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**Diaspora 2.0:
Mapping Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian Online Identity Politics**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2016

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Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines global diaspora politics in the digital age. It is based on the premise that technological advances over the last decade have given rise to new and more public forms of diaspora identity politics that have become increasingly important to International Relations and global affairs in general. The thesis argues that Internet web 2.0 technologies are empowering ordinary people across the globe with the communicative opportunities necessary for transnational political participation and identity-based mobilisation. While the relationship between user-centered web 2.0 technologies and transnational patterns of diasporic engagement have attracted significant attention in recent times, very little is known about what comprises online diaspora identity politics or what they actually look like. The majority of scholarship on diaspora politics continues to reinforce ‘triadic relations’ between the homeland (real or imagined), the host country, and the diaspora itself and remains confined to this paradigm.

The online focus of this thesis aims to challenge state-centric approaches to international politics that oversimplify and essentialise diasporas as homogenous entities, primordial ‘things’, ethnically bound groups or single units of analysis. The thesis argues that in the digital age the theoretical and methodological assumptions guiding mainstream actor-based or triadic-led approaches to diaspora politics are far too reductionist and limited. To investigate the various ways web 2.0 technologies are changing the contours of contemporary diaspora politics, the thesis employs a three-pronged mixed-methods approach that includes both online and offline data collection techniques. A major contribution of the thesis is its web-led methodology, which was designed to examine and analyse the online presence of three different ‘stateless’ case studies (Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian diasporas) and the individuals directly and/or indirectly involved in these diaspora identity politics. The empirical research combines statistical data and digital mapping results from e-Diasporas Atlas corpora with web-based content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Using a transnational social movement perspective, the thesis focuses on the key activities, themes and issue-agendas that link to make up the ‘global diaspora politics’ of each case study.

The thesis highlights that web 2.0 technologies are supporting and enabling more expressive and global forms of diaspora identity politics from the grassroots which extend beyond the triadic relational model and nation-state containers. Common across each of the three case studies is the use of human-rights based language, which is shown to play a key role in binding diasporic grievances and political claims between people across various locales, countries of settlement and the international system. The thesis concludes by recommending future avenues of exploration in this budding area of research, including the broader implications of using ‘Big Data’ in the discipline of International Relations and global politics. The research presented in the thesis is but one attempt to reach a greater understanding of the growing interconnection between online political expressions and offline political participation that has come to define the digital age.

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I.

1. Introduction

In response to the Israeli offensive in Gaza, January 2009 witnessed the mobilisation of mass protests and transnational debates surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of Palestine. One such protest in Toronto, Canada, was documented and posted on YouTube.¹ Protesters chanted “*Free, free Palestine*”, while waving a variety of flags (Palestinian, Turkish and Canadian, and even those of Israel, Hezbollah and Hamas). CBC News estimated that some 10,000 people were also engaged in similar protests on the streets of London in the UK.² These protests had been publicised and organised online through Facebook, Twitter and numerous pro-Palestinian solidarity websites.³

That same year, after months of escalating tension as well as violence and allegations of human rights abuses, members of the Sri Lankan Tamil (hereafter Tamil) diaspora began to mobilise. Calls to action were publicised and coordinated online⁴, snowballing into mass Tamil protests on a global scale. Demonstrations varied from hunger strikes to (in extremely rare cases) self-immolation. The BBC reported that during this time protestors intentionally

¹ “Toronto Anti-Israeli Protest,” *YouTube.com*, last modified January 3, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DKmFK5iof0>>

² “Worldwide Protests Urge End to Attacks on Gaza,” *CBC.ca*, last modified January 3, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/01/03/gaza-protests.html>>

³ Rami Almeghari, “Scared but Steadfast in Gaza,” *Electronicintifada.net*, last modified January 4, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<https://electronicintifada.net/content/scared-steadfast-gaza/7921>>

Gaza Images: “Beit Lahiya UN School,” *KABOBfest.com*, last modified January 19, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.kabobfest.com/2009/01/gaza-images-beit-lahiya-un-school.html>>

Philip Weiss, “Amnesty International says Israeli soldiers used Gaza civilians as ‘human shields’.”

Mondoweiss, last modified January 25, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010.

<<http://mondoweiss.net/2009/01/amnesty-international-says-israeli-soldiers-used-gaza-civilians-as-human-shields>>

⁴ “Tamil Diaspora Organisations urge the High Commissioner for UN Human Rights Council to release the report on OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka,” *Tamilsforum*, last modified February 15, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://tamilsforum.co.uk/2015/02/tamil-diaspora-organisations-urge-the-high-commissioner-for-un-human-rights-council-to-release-the-report-on-ohchr-investigation-on-sri-lanka/>> “National: Tamil group calls out PM,” *DailyHeraldTribune*, last modified May 20, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.dailyheraldtribune.com/2009/05/20/national-tamil-group-calls-out-pm>> “Focus on Tamil protests by CBC ‘As it Happens,’” *Dbsjeyaraj*, last modified May 13, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/510>>

blocked thoroughfares in central London.⁵ The use of human chains was increased to hitherto unprecedented levels; on May 10 2009, the Gardiner Expressway—a major highway in downtown Toronto—was closed down due to demonstrators, including children in strollers.⁶

The year 2009 also marked the 25th anniversary of Operation Blue Star, a military action in response to increased Sikh separatist protests and militancy. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered armed forces to attack the holiest of Sikh shrines, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, and many hundreds of Sikhs and civilians were killed under a full media blackout that according to human rights activists hid numerous instances of rights violations, including the summary execution of bound Sikh captives. The result was mutinies among Sikh army battalions and later that year Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards. The BBC Asian Network aired *Blue Star 25 Years*, a documentary focusing on the impacts the events of 1984 had on Sikhs living in the UK, including interviews with those who supported the creation of the Sikh state of Khalistan.⁷ A commemorative rally in central London was organised by the UK Sikh Federation to mark the anniversary. Information on the “1984 Remembrance March and Freedom Rally” was publicised and disseminated on personal blogs⁸, forum websites⁹ and YouTube under the slogan, “25 years has passed, but still no justice has been served...why?”¹⁰

⁵ “Tamil Demonstrators Block Streets,” *BBCNews.co.uk*, last modified April 20, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8007858.stm>>

⁶ “Toronto Protestors End Blockade on Major Toronto Highway,” *CBC.ca*, last modified May 11, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/toronto/story/2009/05/10/toronto-tamilprotest.html>>

⁷ “Operation Blue Star 25 Years On: BBC Asian Network Remembers Amritsar,” *BBCNews.co.uk*, last modified May 25, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/05_may/29/blue_star.shtml>

⁸ Manvir Singh, “Where will you be on 7th June,” *ManvirSingh (blog)*, last modified May 23, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://manvirsingh.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/where-will-you-be-on-7th-june.html>>

“June 7th 2009 Sikh Remembrance March & Freedom Rally Central London,” *DalKhalsa (blog)*, last modified May 20, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <http://dalkhalsa.blogspot.co.uk/2009_05_17_archive.html>

⁹ “Remembrance March & Freedom Rally (Sunday 7 June 2009 in Central London, UK),” *SikhSangat*, last modified May 20, 2009, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/44399-remembrance-march-freedom-rally-sunday-7-june-2009-in-central-london-uk/>>

¹⁰ “2009 Trailer: Remembrance March & Freedom Rally,” *YouTube.com*, last accessed November 10, 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKPft393Y6c>>

1.1 New Communicative Opportunities

Aside from the coincidence of the calendar year in which they happened, the above events may appear to have little to do with one another. These political conflicts and instances of mobilisation notably differ in their geo-political contexts and historical origins, and are linked to specific real or imagined¹¹ homeland narratives of grievance. Collectively, however, they shed light on two intersecting trends which I argue are fundamentally reshaping the landscape of contemporary international politics.

Firstly, the above snapshots demonstrate that increasingly diverse sets of non-state actors are now using Internet technologies for political purposes. With limited barriers to entry, user-centred online platforms facilitate cross-border ties and can mobilise networks of engagement and calls to action on a transnational scale. Secondly, we can view them as instances of global diaspora politics, in which unresolved grievances and attachments to the ancestral homeland act as virtual links between geographically dispersed populations. As tools for change, online networks are beginning to function as transnational springboards for new and more public forms of diaspora identity politics.

The rapid growth and spread of Internet communication technologies over the past decade can (at least partially) explain why diasporic and identity-based politics have become increasingly salient issues in world politics. It is a key argument of this thesis that online platforms introduce new communicative opportunities necessary for transnational identity construction and transnational political mobilisation. The virtual world is dynamic, flexible, and asynchronous. Through the rise of social media, hashtag activism and cross-border content sharing we can see that cyberspace presents new opportunities for and challenges to international politics more generally and in particular to the study of global diaspora politics.

The events described briefly at the start of this introductory chapter are but a few examples of the growing interconnectedness between online political expression and offline political participation. Web-based (user-centred) transnational networks are multidimensional; as such they encourage new forms of power and patterns of identity expression which require further scholarly attention from within the fields of global politics

¹¹ For uses of the term “referent-origin” see: Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

and International Relations (IR). The multifaceted ‘networks of networks’ that make up the World Wide Web offer a fundamental challenge to top-down state-centric approaches commonly used in these fields. The discipline of IR has neglected the complexity of web-based diaspora politics because these user-centred networks are organised horizontally with bonds extending well beyond the traditional geographical and territorial borders of the nation-state. This major theoretical and methodological gap forms the basis of inquiry for this thesis.

1.2 Research Background

My thesis focuses on global diaspora politics in the digital age, an area of study that has been largely overlooked in mainstream international politics and in academia. The reason for the perpetuation of this oversight lies in the apparently rigidified state-centric approach of global politics and IR theory. Traditional approaches to IR rely on static and oversimplified conceptualisations of the state as defined by physical territories and geopolitical borders. From a top-down perspective, the ‘nation-state’ is treated as an all-encompassing unit of analysis in which territorial boundaries demarcate or ‘contain’¹² a particular sense of nationalism, common identity or political ideology.

According to Adamson and Demetriou, “[m]ainstream IR continues to be grounded in a rather dated view of the relationship between identity and territory.”¹³ As the “paradigmatic Other of the nation-state,”¹⁴ diasporas transcend the traditional boundaries of the state, challenging scholars to (re)consider the impact of cross-border connections in domestic and international politics. Diasporas are a unique “force in identity formation”¹⁵ processes and

¹² On the concept of ‘methodological nationalism’ see: Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation–State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 2 (4) (2002): 301-334; Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology,” *International Migration Review* 37 (3) (2003): 576-610; John Agnew, “The Territorial Trap: the Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory,” *Review of International Political Economy* 1(1) (1994): 53-80.

¹³ Fiona B. Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou, “Remapping the Boundaries of “State” and “National Identity”: Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (4) (2007): 493.

¹⁴ Khachig Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and its others: in lieu of a preface,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1 (1) (1991): 3-7.

¹⁵ Yossi Shain, *Kinship & Diasporas in International Affairs* (USA: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 124.

practices because they function “outside the state but inside the people.”¹⁶ The study of diaspora identity politics is both methodologically and conceptually inconvenient for mainstream IR, as scholars are inherently required to extend the scope of their analyses beyond state-based territorial logic. While a handful of IR scholars have made excellent contributions to this emerging field, concentrated efforts must be made to consider how de-territorialised modes of diasporic organisation¹⁷ are being affected and enhanced by increasingly digitised transnational networks of engagement.

In this thesis I confront the state-centric bias of international politics by engaging with web-based forms of global diaspora politics; decentralised and leaderless networked processes that bypass and transcend the boundaries of the nation-state through multi-layered transnational linkages. I view the state-centric nature of IR theory as increasingly limited in its ability to critically examine the emerging role of web-enabled non-state networks in contemporary global politics (identity, activity and issue based networks). As a starting point, it is important to note that while diaspora as a concept remains highly contested, a constant in its varying conceptualisations is its transnational scope.¹⁸ Contemporary understandings of diaspora emphasise cross-border processes, in which a shared sense of collective identity (usually national, ethnic or religious) and attachments to a particular ancestral homeland (real or imagined) connect people who are otherwise dispersed.¹⁹ According to Yossi Shain, diasporas promote transnational ties through de-territorialised cultural affinities and community-based sentiments, and can act as “bridges” or “mediators” between host and homeland societies due to their unique “international location.”²⁰

A growing number of IR scholars²¹ have started to take an active interest in diaspora politics, often in the context of civil war and conflict (diasporas as peace-wreckers or peace-

¹⁶ Ibid., Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, “Diasporas and International Relations Theory,” *International Organisation* 57(3) (2003), 451.

¹⁷ Adamson and Demetriou 2007, 495.

¹⁸ For the relationship and interplay between diasporas and transnationalism, see: Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners?* Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods, eds., Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, IMISCOE Research, 2010).

¹⁹ Shain and Barth (2003: 452) define diaspora as “people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland – whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control.”

²⁰ Shain 2007, 128.

²¹ See for instance: Hazel Smith and Paul B. Stares, eds., *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?* (Tokyo; New York: United Nations Publications, 2007); Rajan Varadarajan, “Strategic Marketing

makers), economic resource flows (remittances to the country of origin), and foreign policy agendas (ethnic lobbying). For the most part, these studies remain well anchored in the state-centric approach of mainstream IR. Either explicitly or implicitly, much of the scholarship continues to build from what is commonly known as the “triadic model.” In this spatial model, diaspora politics unravels around core triadic²² relationships between the host country, the homeland (real or imagined) and the diaspora itself.

The triadic model has been criticised for its overt simplicity and its limited capabilities to fully grasp the global reach and complexity of contemporary diaspora politics. It cannot account for the multi-faceted cross-border relationships that connect dispersed diasporic pockets and global populations. Nor does it consider that diaspora linkages can stretch across multiple states and produce very different local effects. The web-based empirical data presented in this thesis challenge the conceptual and methodological assumptions that guide more traditional triadic approaches to diaspora politics. I argue that because the triadic model builds from state-centric approaches to international politics, it inherently essentialises diasporas as bound groups or ‘things’ and undermines the network-based connections that feed and foster an increasingly diverse set of (user-centred) diasporic activities and interests. While displacement remains an important factor in notions of diaspora, virtual connectivity has produced transnational identity flows and patterns of diaspora politics that are now an integral part of global politics and require further empirical exploration.

Advances in Internet communication technologies, particularly over the last decade, have had a profound impact on the cross-border flow of goods, capital, data, information and ideas. Today, the concept of cyberspace has become synonymous with “technological innovation”, because its users interact over “electronic fields” that spatially transcend “territorial, governmental, social, and economic” barriers.²³ New communicative

and Marketing Strategy: Domain, Definition, Fundamental Issues and Foundational Premises,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 38 (2) (2010): 119-140; Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, “The Politics of Migrants’ Transnational Political Practices,” *International Migration Review* 37 (3) (2003): 760-786; Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, “Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia,” *International Security* 24 (3) (1999): 108-138; Maria Koinova, *Ethnonationalist conflict in Postcommunist States: Varieties of Governance in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Kosovo* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²² See for instance, Gabriel Sheffer, ed., *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²³ Nazli Choucri, *Cyberpolitics in International Relations* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 7.

technologies enable new forms of de-territorialised diasporic mobilisation, connecting online and offline spaces through identity-based political bonds. Virtual diaspora engagements, while diverse and asynchronous, do characteristically interconnect through shared markers of collective identity or specific political agendas. Triadic models cannot explain the virtual politics of these diasporic expressions in terms of how they are represented, organised, and hyperlinked online.

While a handful of IR scholars²⁴ have recognised the mutually embedded relationship between digital technology and politics, critical assessments of the cyber domain continue to reinforce grounded state-based models. Issues directly affecting or challenging the authority of the state as a single bound unit (such as security based threats or large-scale mobilisations pinned against key government institutions) take priority and continue to garner more mainstream attention.

In recent times, the analytical primacy of government- and state-based structures in the field of international politics has slowly begun to loosen its grip.²⁵ Territorial borders have grown increasingly porous in the digital age, mainly due to the growing ubiquity and relevance of digital technologies and user-centred online networks in our daily lives. Up until the early 21st century (post 2005, the web 2.0 era), the cyber domain was commonly treated as a matter of low politics—a label used to signify non-contentious background conditions, routine choices and procedures.²⁶ This differs from high politics, which focuses on questions of national security, key decision-making institutions, large-scale government bodies and their influence on state interests and values.²⁷

Level-based distinctions between high and low politics are not so clear-cut in today's digital age. These vertical hierarchical models of global politics are increasingly problematic because they fail to consider that online networks are horizontal and multidimensional by nature. Nazli Choucri, a noted pioneer in the field of cyberpolitics asserts that, "issues connected to cyberspace and its users have catapulted into the highest of high politics," the

²⁴ Nazli Choucri and David D. Clark, "Integrating Cyberspace and International Relations: The Co-Evolution Dilemma," (2012), 1.

²⁵ Choucri 2012, 5.

²⁶ Choucri and Clark 2012, 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

key difference being that “[t]he state is a latecomer to this domain.”²⁸ As a human-led transnational phenomenon, the virtual world transcends traditional levels of analysis used in the field of IR (the individual, the state and the international system).²⁹ Internet web 2.0 technologies permeate every inch of the globe on a virtual basis through their users, and although there are some concerns about inequalities of access, Internet users represent an increasingly diverse set of individuals that now number three billion³⁰ (and counting).

From the above, we can see that state-centric approaches to international politics continue to lag well behind the global interconnectedness that has come to define today’s digital age. To treat the online community and the virtual world as an afterthought or as an entity that complements real-life events is far too simplistic and theoretically convenient. The virtual is in fact helping to shift the dynamics of power in global politics. That the online can be harnessed and leveraged for political purposes is especially empowering for marginalised individuals and isolated non-state actors, whose voices would otherwise likely fall through the cracks in the international system.

The growing ease and versatility of digitally enabled transnational exchanges are pushing scholars and policymakers to (re)consider contemporary international politics beyond the state-based unit of analysis. At the most basic level, Internet web 2.0 technologies empower connected individuals with “new and powerful ways to articulate and aggregate

²⁸ Nazli Choucri, *Cyberpolitics*, The Oxford Companion to Comparative Politics, ed., Joel Krieger (USA: Oxford University Press, 2013), 268.

²⁹ Such approaches are embedded in realist assumptions, the dominant paradigm of IR, which emphasise the importance of the state and state-based interests in international politics. See: Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War: a theoretical analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). The realist paradigm focuses on the distribution of power among states as the driving force of international relations. See for instance, Robert Reardon and Nazli Choucri, “The Role of Cyberspace in International Relations: A View of the Literature,” *ISA Annual Convention*, San Diego, CA, 2012, 5. Choucri (2012, 25) discusses the four levels: individual, the state system, the international system and the global system. Cyberspace is explained as a human-created, technological driven generation of new space of interactions that transcend the conventional three images of the international system. Choucri advocates for a fourth level, “the global system” which encompasses the international system and is composed of state actors and others enfranchised by the state, as well as those that are commonly thought of as transnational.

³⁰ “ICT Facts and Figures – The world in 2015,” *ITU*, last accessed August 14, 2015.

<<http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx>>

“Internet used by 3.2 billion people in 2015,” *BBCNews.co.uk*, last accessed May 26, 2015, last accessed August 14, 2015. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-32884867>>

“Internet Users,” *InternetLiveStats*, last accessed August 14, 2015. <<http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users>> “Internet well on way to 3 billion users, UN telecom agency reports,” *United Nations News Centre*, last modified May 5, 2014, last accessed August 14, 2015.

<<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47729#.Vc5e8SxViko>>

their interests and mobilise for action.”³¹ In the context of diaspora, online platforms allow new non-state actors (most notably youth populations) to set agendas, develop claims and communicate political goals publicly and with greater autonomy. With limited barriers for inclusion, the online community has fast become the quintessential outreach platform for a variety of non-state actors (informal groups, formal organisations, everyday individuals), including those who engage in diaspora politics.

1.3 Research Purpose

In this thesis, I focus on the virtual dimensions of global diaspora politics and analyse the modes of engagement that characterise these user-centred communicative networks. I agree with Nazli Choucri’s assertion that even though cyberspace remains under-theorised and under-researched in IR, it is nevertheless an extremely important political arena in contemporary times. According to Choucri, “[virtual] space offers new opportunities for competition, contention, and conflict—all fundamental elements of politics and the pursuit of power and influence.”³² On this point, Choucri argues that the growing ease of cyber access³³ has reduced barriers of political participation and online expressions, which notably:

- Enable new voices in communication and networking strategies
- Encourage the development of new content and knowledge
- Help consolidate political discourse and the formation of cyberpolitics through the pursuit of norms, goals and modes of engagement
- Create new venues to organise and articulate demands for collective action and responses to shared problems

Guided by these starting assumptions, this thesis traces the mutually embedded relationship between Internet web 2.0 technologies and contemporary diaspora politics by examining three case studies—the Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian diaspora communities. My research

³¹ Choucri and Clark 2012, 3.

³² Choucri 2012, 6.

³³ Ibid., 23.

project differs significantly from the normal triadic assumptions used in diaspora studies because it begins online and follows a research logic that runs against the current of the majority of scholarship on global diaspora politics. The thesis gains its inspiration from a handful of IR scholars who have transcended territorial boundaries to underline the transnational patterns of diasporic engagement and the increasingly important role of technology in facilitating decentralised global connectivity. Here, I am specifically referring to the Brinkerhoff's exploration of "digital diasporas"³⁴ and Mandaville's non-essentialist approach to the Muslim diaspora, which concludes that Internet communication technologies "dis-embed political identities"³⁵ from the nation-state.

I believe that the strongpoint in my thesis is that it extends from prior research into areas of diaspora study as yet unexplored. While other pioneering studies are discussed in greater detail in the literature review section, I wish to emphasise that my research offers an alternative (online) view of diaspora identity politics. Methodological limitations have led previous scholarships to inadvertently infer a cause-and-effect instrumental process from online platforms, which cap the study of online phenomenon and continue to reinforce grounded triadic approaches to diaspora. Without 'big data' research methods—which are used extensively in my thesis—scholars are forced to go online with a purpose. Theorisations of and empirical research into global diaspora politics or online identity-formations have for this reason been limited to a few states (two or three locations), specific actors (often elites), or focused case studies that treat a diaspora as a bounded entity. Rather than going online with a purpose and a set of presuppositions, my research is designed to discover a purpose within online data by studying its relevance to and influence on diaspora politics. While much statistical analysis seems to draw a straight line from an unwarranted assumption to a foregone conclusion, I seek to discover links between and within data that will offer conclusions of their own and strong pointers towards future areas of potential research.

According to Adamson and Demetriou, "[n]ot enough attention has been paid within IR to examining the politics that actually occur within transnational spheres or spaces."³⁶ My research responds to this gap by focusing on those virtual network connections which

³⁴ Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³⁵ Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

³⁶ Adamson and Demetriou 2007, 495.

actively nurture transnational diasporic engagements. Although a crude metaphor, it is important to note that much like a spider's web, the World Wide Web is a net-like structure that catches, traps and clusters content (ideas and information). In the digital age, scholars are increasingly challenged to disentangle these user-centred networks and critically analyse the political implications of web-based activities. It is for these reasons that my thesis asks the following **research questions**:

1. *How is the Internet—particularly web 2.0 technologies—changing the contours of global diaspora politics?*
2. *What is the impact of the World Wide Web on diaspora identity politics and why does this matter for world politics?*

To address these questions, the thesis offers a web-based empirical study of global diaspora politics. The first of its kind, the study examines the online identity politics of three stateless diasporas (Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian) and the individuals who are directly or indirectly involved in these virtual network structures. The research presented is based on digital mapping techniques and web-based crawls conducted under the auspices of the Paris-based e-Diasporas Atlas project.³⁷ Web-based cartographic results (corpus visual representations) were created through a series of crawls as well as by virtual analysis, coding and classification. These corpora provide a snapshot of diasporic online presence, and are complemented with web-based content analyses and key informant interviews.

The project aims to draw attention to the notable shift in academic perspective, from describing diasporas as theoretical bounded entities to more nuanced understandings of a diaspora as a way of life, an expression and a lived experience that can extend beyond the traditional boundaries of the nation-state. The thesis lies within the area occupied by diaspora studies, transnational social movements, and new media studies. An interdisciplinary approach is used to extend the scope of analysis beyond the triadic model, which inherently treats diasporas (and their politics) as homogenous entities. Through a fine-grained analysis of computer-mediated communications (CMC), I sketch out the key activities, themes and issues that link to form the 'global diaspora politics' of each case study.

³⁷ See: e-Diasporas Atlas. <<http://www.e-diasporas.fr>>

The empirical results presented in this thesis demonstrate that Internet technologies and web 2.0 online platforms represent structures on which the actions of globalised diaspora politics are increasingly becoming reliant in two key ways:

- 1) As a mobilising structure: the web can be leveraged, and offers actors a de-territorialised tool allowing them to facilitate and coordinate calls for collective action and political mobilisation between online and offline spaces. In these instances the web serves a supportive function, easing cross-border communications between various dispersed populations, which ease on the ground engagements.
- 2) When inscribed with meaning or sense of collective identity (symbols, language, imagery), the web-based networks serves as an additional space for identity formation and community representation activities. In these instances, the web enables connective³⁸ action—modes of online engagement that can be considered as both expressive and performative actions in themselves.

The research presented here shows that global diaspora politics are multifaceted in their approach and are intended for as wide an audience as possible. While they often conflate identity with political interests, these de-territorialised networks organise themselves around ethno-religious grammar and community-specific symbology which functions not only as unifying reference points for otherwise dispersed populations but as intimations of identity formation in and of themselves. Diasporic modes of online engagement reinforce shared sentiments of attachment and belonging, using commonly understood symbols or graphics

³⁸ See for example, Lance W. Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics,” *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (5) (2012): 739-768. Lance W. Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalisation of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

that transcend language. While complicating the field of study, online representations of identity offer myriad ways in which users can relate to each other and their shared identities at a time when notions of diaspora are growing increasingly flexible as individuals who engage online may or may not have first-hand experience of the homeland. The concept of diaspora is constructed, imagined and negotiated by an increasingly diverse set of individuals online, where in theory anyone can have a voice and all voices are equal. This is most notably visible in narratives of grievance, which strategically employ ‘rights-based’ language to raise awareness and gain recognition from a wider international audience.

1.4 Chapter Outline

The conceptual framework of the thesis is presented in Chapter Two, which builds from key literatures on diaspora, transnationalism (transnational advocacy/issue networks), social movements and new media communication. It begins by reviewing the limits of key theoretical approaches that essentialise diasporas as ‘things’ and reify triadic relational approaches to global diaspora politics. The chapter then introduces the conceptual framework by arguing that notions of diaspora are best understood in terms of mobilisation processes and active practices. Analytical concepts from social movement literature are useful in drawing attention to the dynamic identity-based processes that connect diasporic agendas and claims transnationally, and literature on these concepts is explored here. The project builds a theoretical framework for data collection which will help make sense of the key activities, themes and issues that come to form and represent the online diaspora politics of each case study.

In Chapter Three I introduce the three case studies I will be using in this research—the Sikhs, the Tamils and the Palestinians—and explain the methodologies and the research design of the thesis as a whole. I begin the chapter by introducing the virtual ethnography and the benefits of comparative case studies to explain common trends and patterns of diaspora identity politics in the modern world. While each case study presents key differences in its historical context and present online mobilisation, I selected them due to their status of diasporic statelessness, which offers an interesting cross-comparison in the understanding the processes of mobilisation. Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian issues remain of great concern in key immigration hotspots such as Canada, the US and the UK. In the thesis I

will be triangulating three methods, combining the results of digital mapping with web-based content analysis and semi-structured interviews for each case study. The mapping of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian activity networks was conducted under the auspices of the Paris-based e-Diasporas research project.³⁹ The methodological chapter concludes with a discussion on ethical considerations and reflexivity, issues which are particularly complex in Internet-based research. With the methodology and purpose of the thesis explained and outlined, the following three chapters concern the case studies, their differences and similarities, as well as the unifying common theme of online connectivity.

Chapter Four: the Sikh diaspora; religion, community and culture.

In Chapter Four I examine Sikh online identity politics. My findings indicate that the majority of web-based Sikh activities centre on themes of religion, community and culture. Online representations are largely maintained by and directed towards self-defined members of the Sikh diaspora. As a community defined by shared sentiments of religious identity, online platforms are used to mobilise responses to contemporary threats to the Sikh faith. In the post 9/11 environment, ‘Turban Politics’ has emerged as a key concern for practicing Sikhs. My research indicates that the Sikh corpus is infused with ethno-religious grammar and Sikh-specific symbols, highlighting the enabling function of the web as an additional site for community representation and identity formation.

Chapter Five: the Tamil diaspora; politics, mobilisation and support.

Here I look at online representation for the Tamil diaspora. My research indicates that the web serves as a mobilising structure and an additional site for the transnational Tamil community to unite and connect to homeland politics. The majority of Tamil websites focus on disseminating Tamil-specific news affairs, with an emphasis on human rights and community-based activities in their political coverage. Online mobilisation activities focus on raising international awareness of human rights violations committed against innocent Tamil civilians during the closing stages of the civil war in May 2009. In the current rebuilding phase, the transnationally dispersed community has assumed much of the responsibility for the Tamil community and its struggle for national liberation in North East Sri Lanka. The enabling and supportive function of online networks has proved especially

³⁹ See “e-Diasporas Atlas.” <<http://www.e-diasporas.fr>>

important in organising and coordination calls to action that can be followed by Tamils worldwide.

Chapter Six: the Palestinian diaspora; causes, identity politics and a global voice.

In studying the online representation of the Palestinian diaspora, I discovered that compared to the other two cases, the Palestinians maintain much looser boundaries of identity-based inclusion. The growing internationalisation of the Palestinian political cause has made it comparatively difficult to distinguish online representations of diaspora politics from transnational social movements focused on issues of human rights and injustice. However, my research highlights the fact that news and community-based websites, peace issues, political rights and protest activities maintain a significant presence within the Palestinian online corpus. For the Palestinians, the web functions as a mobilising structure as was the case for the Tamils, but differs by supporting much looser networks of participant members and cause-based activists, allowing for more coordinated and efficient collective action at grassroots levels. Palestinian solidarity and boycott movement campaigns play a key role in mobilising political agendas focused on homeland issues, but seek wider levels of more general global support than the other two case studies.

In Chapter Seven I expand upon the case study results by undertaking a comparative analysis of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics. I begin this process with a deconstruction of the multi-faceted actor networks that directly and indirectly engage with online diaspora politics, and follow with a summary of corpus activities building from web-based content analysis results. From this I am able to conclude that in all three case studies, online diasporic content is noted to conflate cause-based political interests with community-based identity mobilisation processes. This means that sentiments of belonging and shared collective identities intertwine with calls for formal recognition of unresolved grievances. My research also indicates that diasporic claims and political agendas are commonly framed and articulated through the language of human rights. I consider such an indication vitally important as far as the study of International Relations, political science and the humanities is concerned, because I am able to conclude that the Internet is greatly facilitating the ability of diasporic communities to achieve cohesive identities without the need for the existence of a pre-established nation state or even a common geographical territory aside from the homeland—which itself is often an idealised notion idyll which possibly never existed and

maybe never will. What my research indicates is that shared and unresolved grievances are discovering a collective platform—a strongly nationalistic and highly patriotic virtual space which takes the role of a nation and which will find an audience in pressure groups, human rights lobbies and international institutions such as the UN and the EU, as well as fuelling less official channels of protest such as minority political activists or even terrorist rebel groups. Within this online space, common voices can finally get a hearing almost without the hindrances of censorship or retribution. The voices of those who exist in an insular virtual domain are finally finding a collective voice and a global audience.

My aim in using analytical methods is to back up my conclusions with the rigidity of quantification, and to support my case studies in their mutual differences and similarities. But my research is in the final analysis about people and their emotion, so my thesis also includes qualitative aspects—interviews with diasporic group members and online activists from each of the diasporas studied. In Chapter Seven I also include an analysis and visual representation of website domain names for each corpus dataset, which cluster around themes of nationhood, statehood and advocacy. While concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ may overlap, they maintain very different points of reference in global diaspora politics. I present corpus location data which shows that key cities across various countries of settlement are far more coordinated than the triadic lens might otherwise assume, and this is an area which is full of possibilities and potential for future research. I follow this with a comparative analysis of language in diasporic online activities, allowing for a clearer understanding of the contemporary socio-political realities that influence the linguistic mediums of online interactions. Language highlights interesting cleavages between online and offline diaspora identity politics, particularly with reference to barriers of inclusion, mother tongues, and inter-generational realities.

In Chapter Eight I draw on the research findings presented throughout the thesis to offer some overall conclusions on how the web is changing the contours of global diaspora politics. With the presence and the power of the Internet, traditional state-centric approaches to international politics can now be seen to offer a much more limited picture of the transnational mobilisation processes and a comparatively restrictive analysis of the active practices that encompass contemporary diaspora politics. Internet technologies have become ubiquitous, and such connective opportunities call for a reappraisal by scholars of current

paradigms governing diaspora studies and other aspects of politics and the humanities in general. It is becoming increasingly vital to critically analyse notions and definitions of diaspora that go beyond the host-homeland territorial logic that guides triadic relational approaches. Web-based representations of diaspora are far more nuanced, and conflate aspects of shared collective identity with key political interests. I argue that the multi-faceted nature of these borderless virtual connections must be further examined, and that this thesis provides a starting point to more Internet-focused research. Whilst I believe that the findings offered here are important in their own right, they are equally important in offering a springboard to future research in areas highlighted at the end of this concluding chapter.

II.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines existing literature on diaspora politics and some of the key aspects of nationhood and identity. My aim here is to offer a background to the subject of diaspora politics and the fabrication of national identities by examining approaches both traditional and modern in order to situate my own research and provide a starting point for the aims, approach, case studies and conclusions offered in this thesis.

Global diaspora politics has been a subject of continually growing interest since the fall of the great empires and the growth of the nation state. Ethnic enclaves, minorities and diasporas have for a variety of reasons left their homelands and moved across the world in processes of mass migration hitherto unprecedented. The reasons behind these migrations are many—from war, uprisings, natural or man-made disasters through persecution and threats of genocide to more positive expectations of a better life elsewhere.

The reaction to an influx of migrants into countries of settlement have been varied, from interest and cultural acceptance to outright rejection, stereotyping and exclusion from benefits afforded to host state citizens in terms of rights, health and welfare, education and employment. Either way, migrants carry with them memories or ideal imaginings of the homeland, a country which may no longer indeed exist except in the minds and memories of the older generations. As such, intimations of identity form rigidified social structures within diasporas and migrant communities, usually based on symbols, memories, religion or social preferences. These all contribute to the over-arching ethos of identity. These identities, be they social or societal, are fiercely protected and act almost as rallying banners for diasporas.

Whilst these processes have been ongoing for many decades, it is only in more recent times that another form of communication has revolutionised our global connectivity and the ability to connect and share. The Internet first became publicly available in the western world in the 1990s, but over the last ten years, Web 2.0 technologies have speeded up the process and made the Internet more user-driven and user-friendly. Over the last decade the creation of websites and the more technical aspects of the online world are no longer the province of experts, and it is this abrupt rise in a new medium that this thesis seeks to address in terms of diasporic motivation and online activity.

The Internet⁴⁰ has become an essential feature of modern life, a resource that is now ubiquitously interwoven through an ever-growing number of contemporary societies in both the developed and the developing world. As an informal arena⁴¹ for conducting politics, the web attracts new forms of cross-border engagement and expresses political representations that invoke real-world ramifications. The Spanish *Indignados* protests, the civil uprisings collectively known as the Arab Spring and various Occupy Wall Street protests show that people are harnessing the power of online tools to effect real-world change. They may differ in context, and they certainly result in different degrees of success or failure, but such headline-grabbing grassroots initiatives have become part of a massive new wave of digitised⁴², personalised, identity-based political processes that are fundamentally reshaping contemporary global politics from the bottom up.

The emergence of cyberspace creates new dimensions for individual, social, and political behaviour that reshape world affairs by introducing profound shifts in capabilities, influences, actors, demands and interests.⁴³ Now ordinary people can connect and coalesce around common interests, shared beliefs, norms and values, cultural affinities and countless other identity-based political issues with far greater ease and at lower costs than ever before. The end result is that everyday individuals begin to matter in the state-based sovereign

⁴⁰The World Wide Web functions ‘on top’ of the Internet. For the purposes of this thesis, I use the terms ‘web’, ‘online’, ‘virtual’ and ‘cyber’ domains interchangeably. They all speak to an interconnected horizontal network structured around nodes, hyperlinks, text and users.

⁴¹ Choucri 2012, 9.

⁴² Saskia Sassen, “Interactions of the Technical and the Social: Digital Formations of the Powerful and the Powerless,” *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (4) (2012): 457. Digitisation ‘liquefies’ the physical world and reshapes the boundaries that constrains people to territory, reshaping the logics of power.

⁴³ Choucri 2012, 221.

system of international relations.⁴⁴ Given the proliferation and rapid emergence of new technologies, it is perhaps unsurprising that a disconnection has developed between cyber-related phenomenon, IR scholarship and global political affairs.⁴⁵

To address this gap, this thesis concentrates on the rise of online identity politics and uses ‘Big Data’ research methods⁴⁶ to identify new kinds of global politics mobilised through Internet technologies. My thesis differs from previous studies⁴⁷ on ‘digital diasporas’ and ‘transnational imagined communities’ because it uses Big Data research methods as a way to minimise the influence of state-centric thinking that often deters explorations of the online as platform for expressive politics. My research is intended to offer a methodologically rigorous analysis of the key activities, themes and issue-agendas which I contend ‘make up’ online diaspora politics. I aim to show that Big Data research methods are an innovative way for scholars to study contemporary identity politics without being bound or limited to nation-state container approaches. These innovative research methods allow scholars to go beyond a handful of actors or locations and explore the broader transnational processes of identity politics.

Big Data is a broad term referring to datasets that are far too large for traditional analysis, and cover such matters as global Internet searches, network links and mass storage of individual preferences and search histories. The analysis of Big Data is particularly useful in this research, where individual political opinions are being formulated as the background to mass movements or paradigm shifts in views towards pre-existing study methods such as diaspora politics. The existence of computers, servers, systems and databanks big enough to support such analysis is a very new aspect of a rapidly evolving science. Central to the argument that runs through this thesis are notable shifts in the dynamics of power triggered and enhanced by user-centred networks.⁴⁸ The connections afforded by cyberspace⁴⁹ ignore

⁴⁴ Choucri and Clark 2012, 3.

⁴⁵ Choucri 2012, 75.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁷ Brinkerhoff 2009 and Mandaville 2003.

⁴⁸ According to Manuel Castells, networks have no center. They sustain their flexible and adaptable qualities through ICTs and are maintained through a set of interconnected nodes that absorb and process information. See: Manuel Castells, “Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 51 (1) (2000): 15-16. There is a social struggle to assign goals to the network. Nodes are understood as the point at which a curve intersects itself. See: Manuel. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society (The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume 1)* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

territorial boundaries, presenting direct challenges to state-centric understandings of power, influence and leverage in world politics. I intend to study these new intimations of web-based power to investigate the recent rise of global diaspora politics and to clearly demonstrate the ways in which online platforms can facilitate new trajectories of power relations in world politics. Through the exploration of online diasporic phenomena, I aim to show that user-driven features of new technology support political practices, enabling identity-based representations that profoundly affect the conduct of world affairs. In order to do this, existing literature needs to be reviewed and gaps in the research identified, and that is the purpose of this chapter. The lack of specific research on the background of this thesis is made apparent. As the Internet changes global diaspora politics, some studies (for example Brinkerhoff, 2009) have been made on the phenomenon, but none that are systematic or methodologically rigorous. My research aims to address this gap and offer a base for future research.

2.2 Chapter Structure

This chapter is divided into three sections. As I introduce my approach to global diaspora politics through criticism of triadic relational models, the first section will focus on key diaspora debates and the different theories and examples that give the concept meaning. In the second section, I examine the transnational literature in order to contextualise the identity-based bonds that are forcing diaspora politics onto the global stage from a grassroots level. The final section of the chapter introduces concepts from social movement theory to explain the new forms diaspora identity politics being mobilised through Internet technologies and the World Wide Web.

2.2.1 The Power of Web 2.0 Online Networks

Web 2.0 is a comparatively recent development, dating back slightly more than a decade. The term first came into use in 1999 but the technology did not become part of the global

⁴⁹ Cyberspace challenges traditional understandings of leverage and influence in IR and power politics (physicality, permeation, fluidity, participation, attribution, accountability) (Choucri 2012, 3-4). "The web as the finest candidate there is for unsettling international politics," Richard Rogers, *Information Politics on the Web* (United States of America: MIT Press, 2004), 3.

Internet until approximately 2004, when a faster version of the Internet (Web 2.0) was deployed in which users were able to adapt their online profiles and engage at a much more individual level with the online community. More rapid download speeds meant that users could interact in real time and allowed the quick development of social networking. In social and political terms this meant that the traditional state-centric approaches to IR and global politics—which downplayed the social and individual levels of action and response—were now open to new forms of influence from individual and collective levels.⁵⁰ According to Castells, ICT based networks “constitute the new social morphology [organising structures] of our societies” and follow a logic that fundamentally reconfigures the operative outcomes in processes of production, experience and culture—and most crucially, relations of power.⁵¹ The multidimensional interactive nature of web 2.0 technologies and their applications are spawning a power shift that I contend is changing the political landscape both at general levels and more specifically in terms of the way the world’s dispossessed populations can get in touch with each other to re-integrate and re-ignite intimations of group connection and belonging at a much more public and interactive level.

Acknowledging the flexibility of this shifting power dynamic, Sassen posits that today’s digital networks are distinguished and shaped by three core technical properties: decentralised access/distributed outcomes, simultaneity, and interconnectivity.⁵² Online networks are no longer controlled by a centralised (usually western) authority. As such they have the power to set out alternative approaches to common problems such as diasporas, attached politics and issue-agendas. Simultaneity and connectivity work together; news travels across the globe more rapidly and reaches more interconnected sites and users. Online networks maintained through web 2.0 technologies follow a horizontal⁵³ organisational structure, and are diffused globally through Internet-connected user devices (computers,

⁵⁰ Choucri 2012, 77.

⁵¹ Conceptions of power need to be adjusted to analysis of the specific features of the Internet. On this point see, Castells 2000, 19; Castells 1996, 469; Saskia Sassen, *Globalisation and its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: New Press, 1998), 195.

⁵² Sassen 2012, 459.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 458. Technologies accommodate multiple particularities; horizontal rather than vertical integration. Choucri adds that it is hard to differentiate personal/social, private/public, political expressions from statements of threat. She argues hierarchal power relations are slowly being replaced by the diffusion of power, which is slowly changing the international system (2012, 30 and 223).

tablets, smartphones). These technology-enabled networks of networks lack a clear centre in terms of vertical or institutional control, and have no predefined boundaries.⁵⁴

In the current online environment countless senders and receivers (users and their devices) have the potential to reach global audiences by generating online content themselves.⁵⁵ Growth in individual communication means that notions of power and influence are changing in favour of dispersed individual users, whose opinions and feelings are now in line with others who share their views.⁵⁶ Opinions can be shared and may combine to produce groundswells of feeling at an aggregated grassroots level. I argue that these realities are shifting the balance towards new, more informative and participative forms of power based on shared empirical experiences which benefit comparatively resource poor⁵⁷ actors, including those involved in diaspora politics.

Non-state actors equipped with Internet connectivity can use the virtual to accrue and share information, largely bypassing⁵⁸ the authority of the nation-state. This allows pro-diaspora individuals or online groups to create a new and dynamic sense of awareness around contentious issues, political agendas or grievances that might otherwise go unnoticed. In this thesis I will show how web 2.0 technologies work in three diasporic case studies, offering a reflection on the way online communities representing diasporas are unsettling the top-down hierarchical power logic that has hitherto dominated IR and global politics.

⁵⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Network Society: a Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar, 2004), 222; Manuel Castells, "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society," *International Journal of Communication* 1 (1) (2007): 248.

⁵⁵ "Mass self-communication," is a term that describes the "historically novel" communicative characteristics of social media, Web 2.0, and future Web 3.0 platforms. See: Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55. Castells explains mass self-communication networks as a means of sending messages and expressing meanings constructed in people's minds. Content is autonomously decided by the sender, the designation of the receiver is user-directed and the retrieval of messages from the networks of communication is self-selected. See Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social movements in the Internet age* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 7.

⁵⁶ Castells 2009, 10. Power is defined as the relational capacity enabling social actors to influence (asymmetrically) the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favors the empowered actor's interests.

⁵⁷ See for instance, Robert Latham and Saskia Sassen, *Digital Formations: Constructing an Object of Study*, Digital Formations: IT and New Architecture in the Global Realm, eds., Robert Latham and Saskia Sassen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Saskia Sassen, "Local Actors in Global Politics," *Current Sociology* 52 (4) (2004): 649-670; Saskia Sassen, "Neither Global nor National: Novel Assemblages of Territory, Authority and Rights," *Ethics & Global Politics* 1 (1) (2008): 61-79.

⁵⁸ Resource-poor local actors can use the dynamic online platform to partly bypass territorial state boundaries to pursue their own goals (Sassen 2012, 6 and Chourcri 2012, 29).

2.3 Introducing the Concept of ‘Diaspora’

Over recent decades, the study of diaspora⁵⁹ and global diaspora politics has emerged as a major topic of cross-disciplinary academic interest for the social sciences, but basic understandings and meanings of the term remain heavily contested. Many contemporary scholars recognise that defining diaspora as an exact and all-encompassing concept—or even as a contained unit of study—is growing increasingly problematic.⁶⁰ Diasporas have become more of a broad label of reference for dispersed communities and dislocation from an ancestral homeland through voluntary migration or forced exile.⁶¹ Furthermore, the sudden proliferation of the term has led to significant concept stretching,⁶² conflating notions of diaspora with ethnic minorities or religious groups, (im)migrants, transnational communities and long-distance nationalism.⁶³

2.3.1 Classical Approaches to Diaspora and the Triadic Relational Model

This section of the literature review concentrates on classical definitions that have played a key role in framing the concept of diasporas and associated politics. There are still some aspects of scholarship on diaspora politics that reflect diasporas as homogenous entities—single units of analysis linking host and homeland territories. The study of diaspora politics continues to implicitly reinforce essentialist approaches, examining diaspora from the viewpoint of a group, object or thing.⁶⁴ Diaspora politics are still characteristically analysed through a triadic lens, an approach popularised by Gabriel Sheffer.⁶⁵ Key to this approach is

⁵⁹ The word ‘diaspora’ has its origins in the Greek term *diasperien*, from *dia* –, “across” and – *sperien*, meaning to sow or scatter seeds. Anita Mannur and Jana Evans Braziel, eds., *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 1.

⁶⁰ Faist 2010, 14; Rudhramoorthy Cheran, “Diaspora Circulation and Transnationalism as Agents for Change in the Post Conflict Zones of Sri Lanka,” Policy paper submitted to the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Management, (Berlin, Germany 2003): 5; Francesco Ragazzi, “The Invention of the Croatian Diaspora: Unpacking the Politics of “diaspora” during the War in Yugoslavia,” *Working Paper, Global Migration and Transnational Politics*, 10 (2009): 146; Francesco Ragazzi, “Diaspora: the Politics of its Meanings,” *International Political Sociology* 6 (1) (2012): 107-8.

⁶¹ Braziel and Mannur 2003, 1.

⁶² According to Brubaker, This is problematic because “[i]f everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so.” Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28 (1) (2005): 3.

⁶³ Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A comparative perspective* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 17. See also Dufoix (2008, 30) who asserts “[d]iaspora now means “ethnic community separated by state borders” or “transnational community.”

⁶⁴ Ragazzi 2009, 382; Baser 2015, 16.

⁶⁵ Sheffer 1986, 2. These trans-state networks are based on ethnic solidarity, connections and affinities (commanding powerful loyalties, controlling political and economic resources, and influencing political states).

the argument that a state-centric take on global politics neglects to consider large-scale questions of ethnicity and their associated political impacts, and also neglects individual or smaller undercurrents that exist *within* diasporas, a point which this research will strive to emphasise. Sheffer defines the concept of diasporas as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homeland.”⁶⁶ The concept of triadic relational networks is beginning to date badly, but it continues to guide much IR based scholarship on diaspora politics today. The broad strokes of this definition and the over-simplified binary nature of this approach lack nuances which are increasingly becoming available to study in diasporic terms, and treats diaspora politics as a cause-effect phenomenon instead of exploring the inner workings of a diaspora more thoroughly. This thesis will consider literature in its broadest sense, from scholarly books and academic journals but also from online sources that exist at small group—or even individual—levels.

In an effort to remove ambiguity, William Safran offers a far more detailed criteria based taxonomy of diaspora groups.⁶⁷ This is far more relevant to my thesis in terms of sharpening the focus of study onto areas I seek to address. Using the Jewish historical experience⁶⁸ as a prototype, Safran fleshes out the concept of diaspora by focusing on features that distinguish diasporas from other socio-cultural phenomena. This approach is useful to my thesis because it isolates diaspora from other social and cultural phenomena mentioned above and aims to draw attention to the more detailed internal emotional motivations and self-defined attachments that link diaspora communities to their homelands.

Armstrong first applied the term “to any ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a given polity”, see, John A. Armstrong, “Mobilised and Proletarian Diasporas,” *American Political Science Review* 70 (2) (1976): 393.

⁶⁶ Sheffer 1986, 3.

⁶⁷ For more detail see: William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1 (1) (1991): 83-99. 1) They or their ancestors are dispersed from an original ‘center’ to at least two ‘peripheral’ regions; 2) They maintain a memory, vision, or myth about their ancestral homeland – its physical location, history, achievements; 3) They believe they are not fully accepted by their host society and experience a sense of alienation; 4) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they will or should return when conditions are more appropriate; 5) They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance, restoration and prosperity of the their original homeland; 6) They continue to relate (personally or vicariously) to the homeland, and group consciousness/solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. Safran’s taxonomy was first presented in the inaugural issue of the academic journal *Diaspora*, where Khachig Tölölyan explained, “diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (1991, 5).

⁶⁸ Safran 1991, 84.

With clear definitional boundaries, it is easy to see why Safran's taxonomy of diasporas as 'groups' continues to be widely referenced in contemporary studies on diaspora politics. However, the taxonomy is criticised for its static checklist that romanticises diasporic connections to the ancestral homeland. The list inherently ties forced dispersal to a desire to return 'home', which is no longer an accurate premise. Internal diasporic consciousness or self-defined attachments to the ancestral homeland are not entirely dependent on a myth of return. Instead, a study of online diaspora reveals that the criteria of importance are not based only on a desire to return home. For many—especially the younger and more computer-literate diaspora members, their homeland is something that may have changed beyond all recognition or may no longer even exist. For such online communities, the concept of joining with like-minded souls, of righting historical wrongs or at least gaining some kind of recognition for their individual social networks or common ethnicities and ancestry is enough.

This means that new technologies are slowly replacing the myth of return with a series of global online activities and a sense of transnational mobility.⁶⁹ In this thesis, I will explore and expand this line of argument further to consider the virtual, non-physical flows of identity (exchanges of ideas, information, knowledge) that are facilitated by online platforms. Choucri explains that two-way communication flows fostered through online networks can create new possibilities for expressing opinions, taking political stances, and joining in with political activities.⁷⁰ I would take this a step further. Online modes of diasporic organisation are transnational, and these aggregated flows inherently counter insular approaches to 'diaspora' as 'bound ethnic groups or communities. I would argue that instead of Choucri's "two-way flows" online activity is multi-directional and far more complex, and this again fits in with my idea of using Big Data research to attempt a deeper analysis of the process. Instead of focusing on the cultural distinctiveness of diaspora groups—which neglects modern mobilisations of the term—my online approach emphasises a "processes of cultural innovation" and a fuller articulation of identity in countries of settlement.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Faist 2010, 13.

⁷⁰ Choucri 2012, 10.

⁷¹ Faist 2010, 13.

Building from Safran's comparatively narrow taxonomy, Robin Cohen suggests a far more flexible typology for modern global diasporas, leading the study of diasporas further from the traditional binary nexus and helping to construct a platform for my own research. Inspired by cultural theorists like Clifford,⁷² Hall, and Gilroy, Cohen argues that traumatic dispersal and forced exile only partially explains diasporic processes and their connection with what I see as identity mobilisation.⁷³ The strength of Cohen's typology lies in its recognition of more voluntary forms of scattering in addition to conflict-based dispersal.⁷⁴ Metaphorical and imaginative aspects of ethnic solidarity however continue to dominate the literature, unravelling around triadic models (host country/diaspora/homeland). This tends to stifle explorations of online identity politics, reinforcing historical approaches by shoring them up with the facades of new research.

Despite this reinforcement of classical approaches, we can see how newer applications and definitions of the term 'diaspora' have diversified and expanded the subject, particularly in terms of studying day-to-day experience in countries of settlement. Host countries can provide dispersed populations with positive benefits, opportunities and resources not available in the homeland which, when applied to refugee displacement and resettlement, may push the 'myth of return' further from modern understandings of diasporic phenomena. The presence of online technologies, particularly in the era of web 2.0, offers a reappraisal of the individual diasporic experience, and when this is added to the conceptual broadening in the more recent literature, the result is that the virtual world expands to allow diasporas to support an online essence of homeland—even if it does not officially exist in a

⁷² Clifford staunchly argues that there is no key ideal type or form of diaspora and that such a thought process would only serve to detract from scholarly analysis. See: James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3) (1994): 302-338.

⁷³ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, 2nd Edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 1-4.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 6-18. 1) In addition to forced displacement, groups can also scatter or leave the homeland for voluntary reasons (trade, work); 2) Sentiments of ethnic group consciousness have to emerge and be sustained over a considerable amount of time. This can thwart assimilation into host countries and preserve distinct ethnic identity and loyalty to the homeland and its history; 3) Diaspora groups from the same homeland can settle in different countries and still maintain a sense of empathy and solidarity. These groups transcend nation-state boundaries through communal loyalties of belonging. Such transnational relationships bond and connect through language, religion, culture and a shared destiny. Inter-group tensions can have positive impacts on community solidarity; and 4) The quality of life in host countries can be positive. It can be peaceful, and members can preserve and nurture their diasporic identity by intertwining various aspects of their identity (ethnic, national, transnational outlooks) together. Types: Victim diasporas (forced exile: Jewish, African, Armenian), Labour diasporas (economic migration: Indian, Turkish), Trade diasporas (trade routes and links: Chinese, Lebanese), Imperial diasporas (serve and maintain empires: British, French), Deterritorialised/cultural diasporas (chain migration: Caribbean diaspora))

formalised state-territorial sense. Key traumatic historical events have ever-lasting effects, feeding a communal memory to promote identity-based bonds between different diasporic populations—bonds which are supported, and indeed can often be best expressed, in the virtual world. The Sikhs and Kurds are notable examples of modern transnational communities that maintain roots in a leaderless ‘imagined homeland’ that remains under construction and is yet to be formally institutionalised.⁷⁵

While the triadic framework helps simplify and integrate diasporic phenomena into the much broader subject of mainstream international politics, we can now begin to see that it offers a very limited picture of how the transnational dynamics of diaspora network linkages appear today. It is no longer enough to define diasporas in order to fit them into object-based subdivisions or strict criteria-based frameworks that are more focused on classifying them as objects.⁷⁶ Triadic relational networks are structured around host and homeland dualities and diasporas are analysed as unitary actors based on ethnicity, politics or religion. The problem here is that a diaspora is envisioned as a ‘fossilised form’ in which every member thinks the same way and no thought patterns are ever reassessed—an approach that is too unwieldy and blunt to account for the continuing morphology of the fertile and open-ended processes of diasporic evolution and mobilisation.⁷⁷ Diasporas are made up of individuals but defined as groups. It is the aim of my thesis to understand how these individuals collaborate to define the group concept that makes up diasporic identity.

Essentialist frameworks rely on ethnic primordial bonds and discount the internal processes of identity and interest-based negotiations occurring at grassroots levels between participant diasporic members. These negotiations are often discussed online, in free flows of opinion and information that only later become solidified as group opinion. My thesis takes the approach that all members of a given ethnic community can come to form part of the diaspora, but where my work differs is in taking account of the active practices of identity mobilisation that stretch beyond dispersion.⁷⁸ I see the notion that dispersed peoples automatically define themselves through sentiments of ethnic belonging or attachments to an ancestral homeland as a rather convenient generalisation. Instead of looking back to the root

⁷⁵ Cohen 2008, 6.

⁷⁶ Dufoix 2008, 66.

⁷⁷ Braziel and Mannur 2003, 1-3.

⁷⁸ Baser 2015, 16.

causes of the event(s) that caused mass migration, my thesis attempts to examine what happens afterwards, and how that relates to group and individual understandings of diaspora (and their politics).

As such, my thesis challenges traditional triadic relational models, which, in my opinion end up stifling objective analysis and theorisations of diaspora politics. Other studies that rely on comparatively smaller samples (a few actors, elites, a few locations) are unable to fully grasp the theoretical and methodological limitations of this outdated approach. The way individuals identify themselves as community members (if they do at all) requires a more nuanced framework capable of capturing contemporary articulations of diasporic modes of engagement. Descriptive categorisations fit easily into multiple disciplines, and the triadic relational model can be used to study the political implications of diaspora in an analytically concise and organised way (Sheffer, Safran, Cohen).⁷⁹ Adding connective opportunities enabled by web 2.0 allows us to look beyond notions of cultural distinctiveness and homeland displacement and consider more transnationally coordinated mobile flows, dynamic networks and trans-border linkages.⁸⁰ Using 'Big Data' research methods to obtain a large-*n* (1026 websites) sample across three different case studies (Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian), this theory-proposing, theory-testing thesis contributes a descriptive⁸¹ as well as an analytical account of diaspora identity politics in the digital age.

2.3.2 Recognising Active Diasporic Practices and Processes of Identity Articulation

Political scientist Stephen Van Evera explains that observational theory-testing based theses are not common in the social sciences compared to the hard sciences because, this type of project requires large-*n* statistics or case study analysis. The aim of this thesis is to provide both. Through the description of online forms of diaspora identity politics, the thesis is firstly *theory-proposing*: it advances new hypotheses based on the empowering influence of user-

⁷⁹ Faist 2010, 16-17.

⁸⁰ Ibid. On the shift from 'mobility' to 'connectivity' see: Roza Tsagarousianou, "Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Communication in a Globalised World," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 1(1) (2004): 52-66. See also: John Tomlinson, *Globalisation and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 10-13.

⁸¹ Van Evera explains that PhDs can have: theory-proposing, theory-testing, literature assessing, policy evaluative, policy evaluative/prescriptive, historical explanatory, predictive, or descriptive missions. Most often a thesis will undertake a mix of these tasks. See: Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 89-94.

centred Internet web 2.0 technologies. Secondly, this thesis is *theory-testing*: it uses empirical data to evaluate existing theoretical approaches as well as exploring new ones.

In my criticism of classical essentialist approaches, I look to cultural scholars who can unpack the geopolitically-bound diaspora groups and hone in on the internal heterogeneity—the sense of individuality that encompasses the processes of identity articulation. Theorists like Gilroy, Clifford, Hall and Brah approach diasporas as a more fluid, reflexive and politicised entities in the field of identity negotiation. The idea of the nation-state as a contained unit of analysis is critiqued through the relational identity processes that flow across territorial borders—so why can diasporas not be critiqued in the same way? They are not contained units of consistent and uniform identity any more than nation states are. Clifford, Hall and Brah base their work on the Asian and ‘black diaspora’ in postcolonial Britain and underline the constantly shifting processes of diasporic identity mobilisation by rightfully highlighting the country of settlement and examining localised experiences against that background. Recognising such approaches is essential to my online study, because they shed light on the complex relationship between local⁸² realities and global affairs and how this complex relationship helps underpin the essence of identity and feelings of belonging or exclusion.

By linking identity to subjectivities of power, Gilroy pushes for a conceptual disambiguation between race, ethnicity, nation and culture⁸³—terms which are not as interchangeable as state-centric IR would have us believe. As such, Gilroy’s work helps provide a foundation for my own study. His discussion of nationalism and the ‘black Atlantic’, draws attention to the post 9/11 environment, in which the recent upsurge of profiling and hate crimes experienced by Turban-wearing Sikh-Americans has led many self-defined community members to engage more closely with issues of race and ethnicity through the African-American narrative and the global #BlackLivesMatter solidarity movement.⁸⁴

⁸² Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar, “Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (2) (2009): 177-202.

⁸³ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 154-5.

⁸⁴ Simran Colbert-Kaur, “Sikh Americans Should Show Solidarity With #BlackLivesMatter,” *HuffingtonPost*, last modified July 16, 2015, last accessed October 15, 2015. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/simran-kaurcolbert/wielding-kirpans-that-hea_b_7806752.html>

Diasporic discourse is thus explained in terms of alternative public spheres, in which notions of community consciousness and solidarity are maintained beyond nation-state boundaries in order to live within the newly-established boundaries of the diaspora itself.⁸⁵ Clifford backs this up, stating that diaspora studies need to look beyond cross-border movements and recognise the internal complexity of “political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement.”⁸⁶ To reduce diasporic political mobilisation and identity formation processes to a myth of return or an insular, group-encased and static sense of identity rooted in a homeland is becoming an outmoded concept—within an academic sub-genre that is itself rapidly becoming outmoded by the online community. Authors such as Gilroy also help prepare the ground for new examinations of diasporas in which these more subtle changes reflect in, and are reflected by the individuals making up the diasporic community. And in the meantime, technological innovations that have resulted in the emergence of web 2.0 technologies allow members of those groups a platform on which to locate, express and share those views. These links between broadening outlook and technological innovation offer the foundations for a new approach to diaspora studies which cries out for theoretical and empirical research.

Given the area in which my thesis will concentrate, my theories accord in principle with Castells’ network-based argument that identity cannot be separated from power, because power relationships are embedded in the social constructions of identity.⁸⁷ In terms of contemporary diaspora politics, grievance rhetoric and online language, experiences of institutional marginalisation and ongoing suffering or resistance in host countries are just as important as connections to the ancestral homeland.⁸⁸ Collective identities within host-country society are shaped and changed through hybrid interactions, and web 2.0 allows a variety of host-country situations to be explained, articulated and analysed online, linking self-defined diaspora members both within and across various host societies. Seen through a cultural lens, identity articulation and its attached politics can be understood as a dynamic process. Rather than being constrained to a single study unit or seen as a product of cross-border movement, conceptualisations of diaspora can be actively negotiated and (re)absorbed

⁸⁵ Clifford 1994, 308.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Castells 2004, 7.

⁸⁸ Clifford 1994, 306.

by citizens within and outside the diaspora. And of course, where better to express and expand upon all manner of associated feelings—both positive and negative—than in the virtual world? By focusing my attention on that very area, I will show that diasporic experiences are defined not by a sense of purity, but by a “heterogeneity and diversity” of identities working through differences and continuously reproducing themselves anew.⁸⁹

My thesis seeks to advance the study of global diaspora politics by showing that Internet web 2.0 technologies support and enable new forms of identity politics outside the triadic relational model. By tracing online contemporary political phenomenon we can examine four important points. Firstly, diaspora politics needs to be considered differently in the digital age. Secondly, the virtual impact of diasporas has immense theoretical implications on observations of contemporary political phenomenon, yet is rarely given a great deal of attention. Thirdly, we need to examine the ways in which diaspora identity politics resembles more traditional triadic models in order to identify what the differences are and in what way they are manifested. Fourthly, we need to observe whether or not intimations of diasporic identity unfold in the manner predicted by the triadic relational model, in order to examine whether the subject of the thesis (human behaviour online)⁹⁰ mimics essentialist, primordial or ethnic theoretical predictions.

Post-modern readings are useful to my study because their criticism of the triadic approach help to dislocate notions of collective diaspora identity from idylls of the ancestral homeland. Brah has been one of the key scholars at the forefront of this re-evaluation intervention, arguing that the concept of diaspora “offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins” in which a homing desire does not necessarily link or equate to a desire for homeland.⁹¹ Here, home and dispersion are understood to be in a state of “creative tension”, reducing the validity and location of the ancestral homeland in contemporary diasporic mobilisations.⁹² This is relevant to my study because online diaspora identity formations highlight such re-

⁸⁹ The diasporic experience is: “defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity”.... “[d]iaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference”. See: Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, ed., Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235-6.

⁹⁰ Van Evera 1997, 29.

⁹¹ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 192–3.

⁹² Ibid.

evaluations, and can be viewed as examples of connecting homeland and identity and expressing these concepts through online frameworks. Such intra-diasporic conflicts go largely unnoticed in large-scale triadic relational network models.⁹³ Collectively, the scholars discussed above shed light on the triadic network relations and state-centric generalisations that feed into increasingly outdated essentialist approaches to diaspora identity politics. Having discussed their literary contributions to the study of diaspora and set out the changes that more recent studies and the advent of technology have brought to the subject, I can in the next section go on to refine the concepts of diaspora in the light of the direction this thesis will take.

2.3.3 Refining the Concept of 'Diaspora': Meanings, Methods and Triadic Actors

The triadic approach continues to dominate the study of diaspora politics, even at levels below the global, and even when scholars strive to explore alternative approaches. Through a study of South Asian religious communities, Vertovec presents a three-pronged thematic grouping which sets out the idea that diasporas can be understood as a social form, a type of consciousness and a mode of cultural production—all of which possess different core meanings.⁹⁴ However, this preoccupation with categorisations and meanings limits our ability to explore more deeply and trace the active practices, identity formations and modes of political engagement that are actually taking place in the name of diaspora. This is the key focus of this thesis, that while grouping captures the complexities of 'diaspora' and the politicisation of the concept, I argue that these aspects simultaneously exist as an effect, rather than a cause—an amalgamation of all three meanings.

⁹³ There are differing notions of "origin" and "true belonging" that exist between ethnic communities. Floya Anthias, "Evaluating 'diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity?" *Sociology* 32(3) (1998): 557-580; Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, "Citizenship and Identity: Living in Diasporas in Post-War Europe?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 (1) (2000): 1-15.

⁹⁴ Steven Vertovec, "Three meanings of "diaspora", exemplified among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6 (3) (1997): 277-299. When describing diasporas as a distinct social form, Vertovec builds off the triadic model, citing negative forced dispersal from the homeland, a sense of loss and victimhood (much like the classic Jewish prototype). Conversely, as a type of consciousness, notions of diaspora are meant to convey a state of mind or awareness through experiences that fuel a particular sense of identity. Inspired by postmodern approaches, this type of diaspora can be informed by multi-localities, linking sentiments of here and there through experiences in countries of settlement and identifications with the ancestral homeland. Finally, as a mode of cultural production, the concept of diaspora is explained through the reproduction of socio-cultural phenomena. Here, new forms of culture are (re)produced, which may or may not replicate or transcend cultures rooted in the homeland.

Attempts to clarify the concept tend instead to highlight the theoretical and methodological tensions that continue to plague the study of contemporary diasporas. The overriding problem with many academic diaspora theories is that they view diasporas as being ethnically “rooted in the group itself”, and therefore continue to ascribe identity mobilisations to over-simplistic socio-geographical sources.⁹⁵ Butler argues that the academic⁹⁶ analysis of diasporas fixates on three key features: dispersal in two or more locations, a relationship of sorts with the homeland and the internal awareness of group identity. Added to this framework are variations over time, which are assumed to account for changes and re-imaginings of collective diasporic identity.⁹⁷ In this thesis, I approach Butler’s temporal and historical criteria through the bonds of political identity—with the idea that these bonds and this political identity stems from experience (past migratory causes and processes) combined with an imagined sense of collective belonging. My theory also allows for a greater degree of freedom *within* the diaspora—that multiple identities exist and change within diasporic formations, and that identities fluctuate over time, in different locales and in sub-identities within the diaspora based on factors such as age grouping, gender, ideological stances or religious beliefs.

In an effort to analyse the politics embedded in contemporary diasporas, Shain and Barth divide their members across three categories: core members, passive members, and silent members.⁹⁸ By linking international and domestic political spheres, they investigate the roles of diasporas as international players in foreign policy. They focus on the active roles diasporas play in host country interest groups and lobbying activities and examine weak homelands in political, economic and cultural terms. The approach highlights the dynamic role diaspora groups can play in the relationship between host countries and homelands, but offers only a very limited and static understanding of internal identity-based mobilisation

⁹⁵ Kim D. Butler, “Defining diaspora, refining a discourse,” *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies* 10 (2) (2001): 193.

⁹⁶ For example, Van Hear suggests three minimal criteria, dispersal from a homeland, a lasting presence abroad and exchanges between/among spatially separated populations comprising the diaspora. See: Nicholas van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

⁹⁷ Butler 2001, 192.

⁹⁸ Shain and Barth 2003, 452. Core members: organising elite, intensely active, appeal for more mobilisation activities. Passive members: available for mobilisation when active leadership calls upon them. Silent members: the larger pool of people who are generally uninvolved in diasporic affairs, and mobilise in times of crisis.

processes. It is however very useful to this thesis because it marks the start of a process of scholarly examination of differences within a diaspora. My links will take the form of online representations of international and domestic politics—seen through the lens of online representations of diasporic viewpoint.

The problem with many of these approaches and opinions—and the frameworks that are built upon them—is that they have been constructed to understand the political motivations and resulting implications of predefined ‘groups’, instead of the active practices, communicative engagements or collective identities that I believe contribute to diaspora politics. Analysis unravels around the three ‘essential’ sites that are deemed unique to diasporas—the homeland, the host country and the group itself.⁹⁹ This fixation with host-homeland relationships concentrates on generalisations based on research and academic opinion¹⁰⁰ to represent the diaspora, and completely neglects the dynamic internal processes (usually relating to identity- and interest-based activities) that nurture relational connections between globally dispersed peoples. These internal processes represent the internal workings of the diaspora; the fundamental grassroots opinions of members of the diaspora itself, and as stated earlier, the best way to observe these inner workings is by examining the online output of diaspora members.

2.3.4 The Politics of Diaspora: Constructing and Formulating Meaning through Actions

Online technologies have only recently attracted attention in scholarly research on global diaspora politics. It is worth noting that Cohen was one of the first diaspora scholars to recognise the budding role of the Internet, commenting that “[i]n the age of cyberspace a diaspora can, to some degree at least, be held together or re-created through the mind, through popular culture and through shared imagination.”¹⁰¹ From the late 1990s to the present, the digital world has changed beyond any expectation, and Cohen’s predictive

⁹⁹ Butler 2001, 194. The ‘methodological’ framework is structured around common dimensions of diaspora, and very clearly builds off the triadic relational model: 1) Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; 2) Relationship with the homeland; 3) Relationship with host country; 4) Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora; and 5) Comparative studies of different diasporas.

¹⁰⁰ Scholars have discussed power imbalances and the problem of global polity being treated as a single space where elites sometimes claim to speak on behalf of a diaspora: Fiona B. Adamson, “Spaces of Global Security: Beyond Methodological Nationalism,” *Journal of Global Security Studies*, February (2016); Aihwa Ong, “Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics among Transnational Chinese,” *Interventions* 5(1) (2003): 82–100.

¹⁰¹ Cohen 2008, 26.

remarks are but a small glimpse into the connective opportunities now available to a growing proportion of the world's population.

My research on the virtual dimensions of diaspora identity politics draws attention to the limitations of state-centric territorial logic that reduces global diasporas to homogenous entities, because the online community does not reflect such logic and is, if anything, the opposite of state-centric. From a 'Big Data' research perspective, the findings will show that online diasporic formations are mobilised through shared political interests and identity-based activities at grassroots levels. Countering state-centric approaches, I contend that these transnational bonds extend well beyond the triadic model. Even without the primary digital focus of this thesis, many contemporary scholars have begun to take issue with the predefined and impermeable conceptual boundaries that hamper the in-depth study of global diaspora politics.

To investigate aspects of identity in diaspora politics it is critical to first consider what the term 'diaspora' is meant to evoke, how the term is intended to mobilise, and how the term translates online. I concur with Brubaker's argument that diasporas and diasporic politics are best thought of in terms of idioms, stances and claims.¹⁰² As a category of practice, he explains that "diaspora is a way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population", which in contemporary times often means connecting through political, social, and/or cultural struggles and their attendant desires for change.¹⁰³

Such struggles often take place—or at least are voiced—online, by those who are doing the struggling and formulating the means of expression, rather than academics who are observing them. The online focus of this thesis will move the analytical level to consider the multiple activities, interests and issues contributing to digitised representations of diasporic identities. We do not necessarily know who is formulating what online, but by tracing the intricacies of network connections we can map out the various agendas that bind transnationally dispersed peoples. Although primarily concerned with the interplay between print capitalism and long-distance nationalism, insight from Anderson's "imagined communities" is a useful basis on which to position my study.¹⁰⁴ Anderson states that

¹⁰² Brubaker 2005, 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron, *Woke Up Laughing: Long Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). I follow Glick Schiller and Fouron's definition of long-

“[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”¹⁰⁵ In order to deconstruct and analyse this style, I trace web-based diasporic activity networks to uncover new and innovative forms of imagined community that are being empowered specifically at a virtual level, using three significant case studies to back up my arguments.

A shared imagination of an ancestral homeland offers links to countries of settlement that reflect the identity-based bonds that unify people who might otherwise remain unaware of one another’s presence. User-centred online platforms allow connected individuals to re-invent or re-imagine feelings of belonging and attachment to a homeland they may have never set foot in—possibly because it no longer exists. In the online world iconic imagery, symbolic markers and ethno-religious grammar play an important role in contributing to building shared collective identities. In addition, online networks follow the logic of “mass self-communication,”¹⁰⁶ which grants far more power to everyday audiences as generators as well as recipients of news, especially when compared to Anderson’s top-down Imagined Communities, in which news is provided to the people by the elite-authorities. In the online community, ordinary people can use the web to communicate and share content with mass audiences rather than just consuming media content. According to Castells, ICT empowers people with the ability to send and receive messages interactively, which in turn shape the way in which meanings are expressed and constructed.¹⁰⁷ The cyber domain therefore provides an ideal platform to critically assess global diaspora politics, because its linkages are not organised by a one-way communicative flow (receiving information from central nodes such as print media or television). The horizontal structure of the web (especially web 2.0) is not contained by state-centric interpretations of identity politics.

distance nationalism, whereby individuals can engage (vote, demonstrate, finance, fight, kill, die) for a ‘homeland’ in which they have never lived in. There have been numerous scholarship on this long-distance type of nationalism: Øivind Fuglerud, “Time and Space in the Sri Lanka-Tamil diaspora,” *Nations and Nationalism* 7 (2) (2001): 195-213; Amalendu Misra, “A Nation in Exile: Tibetan Diaspora and the Dynamics of Long-Distance Nationalism,” *Asian Ethnicity* 4 (2) (2003): 189-206; Ivana Djuric, “The Croatian diaspora in North America: Identity, Ethnic Solidarity, and the Formation of a “transnational national community,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 113-130; Sam Pryke, “British Serbs and Long Distance Nationalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26 (1) (2003): 152-172.

¹⁰⁵ On this shared ‘imagined’ belonging, citizens of even the smallest nations never meet most of their fellow-citizens. Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,” (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

¹⁰⁶ Castells 2012, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Castells 2007, 248; Castells 2012, 7.

With the help of new technologies, collective diasporic identity is becoming malleable and pliable because it is a concept that can be employed in terms of what it is meant to convey.¹⁰⁸ On this point, Ragazzi reasons that, “if the definition of the word ‘diaspora’ is so hard to seize, it is because the word has become a word of politics.”¹⁰⁹ As a form of empowerment, non-state actors use the term strategically and subjectively, to stir emotions, to resonate with audiences or to suggest transnational bonds online. This can be done by referencing the ancestral homeland or historical experiences of displacement from it, which in turn feed into narratives of grievance and politically salient issues, objectives and goals on a transnational scale.

The online communicative practices which are most representative of diaspora—those that give the term greater political currency in world affairs—need to be examined more critically. As opposed to seeing diaspora as an agent in global politics, it is more fruitful to shift discussion to the “politicality of defining a population or a set of relations as ‘diasporic’.”¹¹⁰ It is the actors (including the resource-poor) who claim to represent a particular diaspora that are the actual political agents,¹¹¹ and my focus is on the mobilised personal identity politics that accumulate directly or indirectly in the name of collective diasporic interests. This means that beyond formal organisations and institutions, my analysis includes—and indeed concentrates on—new non-state actors; informal groups and individuals who through user-centred online platforms have greater connective opportunities to publicly engage in and create global diaspora politics. Sassen contends that the flexibility of Internet technologies is well suited to informal actors seeking to enter the political scene because cyberspace accommodates a widespread set of struggles.¹¹² My thesis intends to put this suitability to good use to study diasporas from a difference perspective.

¹⁰⁸ From media communication studies, Georgiou asserts that diaspora groups use new media technologies to sustain socio-political transnational connections. The multi-dimensional nature of new media technologies nurture communicative opportunities for minorities striving to mobilise claims and identities. See: Myria Georgiou, “Diaspora in the Digital Era: Minorities and Media Representation,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE)* 12 (4) (2013): 80. See also: Myria Georgiou, Olga Bailey and Ramaswami Harindranath, eds., *Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-Imagining Diasporas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Francesco Ragazzi, *The Croatian “Diaspora Politics” of the 1990s: Nationalism Unbound?* Transnational Societies, Transterritorial Politics, Migrations in the (post) Yugoslav Area, 19th-21st centuries, ed., U. Brunnbauer (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 146.

¹¹⁰ Ragazzi 2012, 107.

¹¹¹ Ragazzi 2009, 2.

¹¹² Sassen 2004, 9.

There is also an innate sense that the user-defined nexus of the Internet—the space enabled by Web version 2.0 technologies in which online identities, minority websites and unpoliced theories exist—is the *de facto* home of the underdog, a place where the underprivileged can have their say in a milieu of uncensored and relatively anonymous freedom and equality. Anyone with a little knowledge can create a website, anyone can commit an opinion to a discussion forum. The Internet is not the province of the rich and powerful, it is instead a forum of influence. This is true across the board; diaspora politics and minority viewpoints can be seen to share a common space not just in the political arena, but also when looking at the political space of the Internet—an ethos that belongs to those whose voices in the days before online outlets went unheard. The Internet occupies a similar space to the underground press of the 1960s, the literary protests of the soviet *Samizdat*, a genre of amateur design and individualism around which alternative identities coalesced in earlier—yet still comparatively recent—generations. As such, the online community seems the perfect expressive forum for diasporic communities.

However, the question of what exactly distinguishes the identity mobilisations of diasporic communities mobilisations in global politics is still problematic, and requires further clarity. Brubaker argues that diasporas can be defined through three¹¹³ core elements: dispersion in space, orientation towards a ‘homeland’ and boundary-maintenance. I treat these basic elements as a loose guideline for further inquiry into online identity mobilisation processes. For example, I view orientation to the ancestral homeland as an increasingly flexible concept. Sentiments of collective identity or self-defined homeland attachments do not necessarily translate into a desire to return to that homeland on a permanent basis. This research will show that in contemporary times, the ‘myth of return’ is more symbolic and is interwoven across identity-infused political agendas and grievance claims mobilised on behalf of constituents in a real or imagined homeland. This is the feeling of real or imagined nostalgia, in the same way that the past is a foreign country—a community to which elderly citizens of developed nations sometimes seek to return; a romanticised imagined idyll with all the negatives airbrushed out. Perhaps the idea of ‘something to belong to’ has replaced the

¹¹³ Brubaker 2005, 5–7. Dispersion can be a forced, violent, and traumatic experience, however, it can also be voluntary for greater economic opportunity or family reunification. The so-called diasporic ‘imagination’—those collective memories or narratives that feed values, identity and loyalty—are entirely dependent on individuals and their daily experiences in the country of settlement.

idea of ‘somewhere to return to’, and this has been greatly enabled by web 2.0 technologies and the Internet.

For diasporas, the imagined communities of the past can occupy the same role—a comfort blanket to which people adrift in an inhospitable foreign environment can cling, a psychological centre around which their thoughts, expressions and outlooks can take comfort in a shared mind-set. These imagined sentiments of belonging and attachment are strongly bounded and populated only by self-proclaimed like-minded people. The online communities of the present can provide exactly the same thing—linking younger generations to the past and reiterating the thought processes of older generations at the same time.

Most relevant to my study, the concept of boundary-maintenance¹¹⁴ explains the active attempts to preserve and distinguish collective identities in countries of settlement. When Brubaker talks about diasporic boundaries, he is not referring to geography or politics. He is referring to practices of solidarity and cross-border relationships that link self-defined members of a diaspora into a networked “transnational community”.¹¹⁵ Much like debates between primordial and post-modern approaches to diaspora politics, there remains a negotiated tension between *boundary-maintenance* (creating boundaries through identity, homeland roots, and now the online community) and *boundary-erosion* (destabilising these boundaries through fluid movement, political de-stabilisation or censorship) in countries of settlement.¹¹⁶ A focus on diaspora in terms of mobilised stances, claims or idioms is a better way to move beyond this binary. As diaspora politics continues to integrate itself into the online community, these boundaries become increasingly contentious because the user-

¹¹⁴ See for instance: Rogers Brubaker, “Beyond ethnicity,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (5) (2014): 804-808; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Andreas Wimmer, “Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (6) (2008): 1025-1055; Andreas Wimmer, “The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (4) (2008): 970-1022; Andreas Wimmer, “Ethnic Boundary Making as Strategic Action: Reply to My Critics,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (5) (2014): 834-842.

¹¹⁵ Brubaker 2005, 5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. Here we can consider Gilroy, Clifford and Hall’s work on hybrid, fluid and creolisation of identities, which emphasise the experiences in the host country. This is also discussed through essentialist/constructivist divides and subsequent approaches to diasporic identity mobilisation, as a social construction see: Fiona Adamson, *Constructing the Diaspora: Diaspora Identity Politics and Transnational Social Movements*, Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks, eds., Terrence Lyons and Peter G. Mandaville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 27. On conceptualisations of diaspora as nomadic/fluid (unbounded) or homeland-centred/ethnic-religious (bounded) entities see: Elizabeth Mavroudi, “Diaspora as Process: (De)Constructing Boundaries,” *Geography Compass* 1 (3) (2007): 467-479.

centred nature of web 2.0 technologies offers networking practices that dislocate and spread identities beyond the traditional territorial containers of the nation-state.

For example, the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992 has not prevented various virtual mobilisations and re-constructions of Yugoslavia. Mapping from the e-Diasporas Atlas project has shown that people who consider themselves part of the former Yugoslavian ethno-national community have come to form an online ‘Yugoslav diaspora’ through various websites without being defined by geographic nation-state containers.¹¹⁷

2.3.5 Notions of Connectivity: Linking diaspora, ICTs and Transnational Flows

In this thesis I use transnational social movement literature as a conceptual guide for my analysis of diaspora identity politics, and back this up with specific case studies. However, to lead into this framework, it is crucial to first acknowledge that a focus on Internet technologies¹¹⁸ prioritises decentralised connectivity when explaining the changing contours of diaspora identity politics. This means that beyond legacies of displacement, transnational links maintained through new technologies can be leveraged to nurture identity-based political bonds between dispersed peoples.¹¹⁹ For example, while the Tamil diaspora has its origins in conflict driven migration, current calls for Tamil Eelam are increasingly based on a politicised collective identity of what it means to be part of the transnational Tamil community. While narratives of migration, uprooting and displacement play a key role in diaspora politics, transnationally fluid relationships (between diverse materials, cultural and mental exchanges) are what fuel the continuous reconstruction and reinvention of imagined communities.¹²⁰ According to Lyons and Mandaville, these diasporic connections are forged

¹¹⁷ Francesco Mazzucchelli, “What remains of Yugoslavia? From the geopolitical space of Yugoslavia to the virtual space of the Web Yugosphere,” *Social Science Information* 51 (4) (2012): 631-648. Other cases have been mapped out as part of the e-Diasporas Atlas project such as the dispersed Ughur community and the Hmong, an ethnic minority originating in China. All of these corpus maps can be accessed through: <http://www.e-diaspora.fr>

¹¹⁸ Kathrin Kissau and Uwe Hunger, *The Internet as a Means of Studying Transnationalism and Diaspora*, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, eds., Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, IMISCOE Research, 2010), 246.

¹¹⁹ Shehina Fazal and Roza Tsagarousianou, “Diasporic Communication: Transnational Cultural Practices and Communicative Spaces,” *Javnost-The Public* 9 (1) (2002): 12.

¹²⁰ Tsagarousianou 2004, 52.

through shared interests that are constantly in flux.¹²¹ We must recognise that the ancestral homeland as it once was, much like its inhabitants, has changed over time. Through rapid modernisation and globalisation flows, Tsagarousianou adds that “there is no going ‘home’ again...[t]here is detour”; the homeland and its socio-political realities are not static.¹²² Palestinians living in North America or Europe may never return to their ‘homeland’, although this has not deterred the community’s overall resolve to echo the claims of Palestinian refugees and populations living in the Occupied Territories who may not have as many resources (financial, educational or technical expertise) to publicly express their grievances.

New technologies create communicative platforms and infrastructures¹²³ that welcome more adaptable expressions of identity; online, individuals can disclose their political interests without divulging more personal details. Through the analysis of network hyperlinks, Kissau and Hunger use Big Data research methods¹²⁴ to show that these “communication structures” weave notions of transnational community, virtual diasporas and ethnic public spheres together.¹²⁵ This provides links with the real and the virtual, in which expressions from each sphere can cross-pollinate in terms of ideas, political stances and common outlooks. However, a key feature of online identity-infused networks is that they spread and cluster based on shared thematic focus, activities and interests, and are not contained by geographic location or centres of population. The research findings of this thesis will show that while decentralised online clusters do suggest boundaries, these networks are in no way fixed or static in the way of territorial nation-state containers.

The asynchronous nature of web 2.0 networks is conceptually significant, because it encourages us to view diaspora identity politics as an active and mobile process of negotiation, rather than a mere cause-effect result of displacement. Along these lines,

¹²¹ Terrence Lyons and Peter Mandaville, “Think Locally, Act Globally: Toward a Transnational Comparative Politics,” *International Political Sociology* 4 (2) (2010): 137.

¹²² Tsagarousianou 2004, 55–56.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁴ Kissau & Hunger 2010, 250. Using “Issue Crawler”, a network visualisation tool the authors trace some 800 websites directly or indirectly involving migrants from the former Soviet Union, Turkey and Kurdish areas of the Middle East now living in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. They explore the organisational structure and political activities that connect (hyperlink) these websites, and compare them to offline on the ground socio-political realities. As explained in the methodology chapter of this thesis, I employ Gephi a network visualisation tool similar to Issue Crawler developed by Mathieu Jacomy of the e-Diasporas Atlas project.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 256–60.

Mandaville's work on transnational Islam and Muslim (Umma) diasporic formations draws attention to the multiple identities and boundaries of communal affiliation that are constantly being (re)imagined through ICTs and new media. In his criticism of essentialist group-based approaches to diaspora politics, Mandaville reminds us that "[w]e cannot start talking about new forms of diasporic Muslim community simply because many users of the Internet happen to be Muslims".¹²⁶ In the same way, case studies in this thesis (especially the Palestinians, who have gained support from other groups and individuals outside their own circles) show that the same holds true for most diasporic communities, ICTs can thus be presented as flexible enabling agents, because they facilitate socio-political processes that encourage debate and dialogue not only over diasporic identity, but what that means for members of diasporic groups. These online expressions are constantly in flux, and invite individuals to actively reflect on what it means to be part of a broader imagined community. For example, websites linking in to the same online network may differ entirely in form or in content or information/knowledge being shared, yet they may claim to represent all members of the diaspora community. While there is no way of deciphering the 'right or wrong' in online identity constructions, aggregates can help us to trace the central disseminating authorities within virtual diaspora networks. In Mandaville's case, Islamic religious markers and symbolic terminology were used to strategically filter, organise, link and bind what Mandaville called "the various Islams of the Internet."¹²⁷ Connective networks maintained their own internal politics, power asymmetries, and disagreements over interpretations of identity (authority over knowledge, in this case what makes a 'good' Muslim, and Islamic vs. Muslim diaspora discourse).

The user-centred nature of web 2.0 allows new non-state actors to look beyond the authority of traditional political elites, community 'gatekeepers', religious organisations and institutions and engage in diaspora politics with greater anonymity. Online platforms offer a springboard for perspectives that challenge the norms, values and codes of community conduct in a variety of settings. People who feel a sense of marginalisation gain a sense of empowerment by engaging online. The research findings of this thesis will show that progressive youth actors use online platforms to help create a virtual place of safety in which

¹²⁶ Peter Mandaville, "Reimagining Islam in Diaspora The Politics of Mediated Community," *International Communication Gazette* 63 (2-3) (2001): 181.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

controversial topics can be discussed more openly with minimal fear of judgement from elders who sometimes find it difficult to share the reins of power of local community institutions. Women's issues, gang related violence, drug addiction, conversations about domestic abuse, and LGBTQ community representation are but a few topics that are more frequently discussed online. The boundaries of what is considered mainstream diasporic discourse can be challenged through these newly mediated interpretations of collective identity, which I argue intertwine perspectives from a variety of locales and daily experiences.

Recognising the lasting impacts of 9/11 on American foreign policy and IR more broadly, Brinkerhoff's work on Digital Diasporas remains one of the more comprehensive studies of online diaspora politics to date. By comparing nine diasporic organisations across five US-based diasporas¹²⁸ she investigates the numerous ways that self-defined 'diasporans' are using Internet technologies. For example, online cyber communities were found in which members of diaspora communities can express their hybrid identities more freely, easing host country integration. Internet technologies afford religious minorities and marginalised populations an open and comparatively anonymous platform to articulate their identities and reconcile past grievances.¹²⁹ At the same time, online diasporic engagements resemble interactions on the ground in that they are structured around relationships of power, influence and authority. Examples of this will be seen in the case study sections. There are intra-diasporic cleavages online, where informal groups and formal organisations have greater financial backing and networked resources appear to more readily influence policies and laws affecting dispersed community members.¹³⁰

Critical of security-based agendas,¹³¹ Brinkerhoff adds that by promoting liberal American democratic values and human rights principles, and by contributing economic

¹²⁸ Through U.S based focus, Brinkerhoff (2009) compares 'diasporans' from Afghanistan, Egypt, Tibet, Somalia, Nepal.

¹²⁹ Brinkerhoff 2009, 65–68, 87.

¹³⁰ In the Sikh case, the United Sikhs' for example are UN Affiliated and therefore maintain a very strong footing online. In the Tamil case, the Canadian Tamil Congress engages in numerous grassroots blood drives that make the organisation more well known. In the Palestinian case, the BDS movement whether 'Palestinian' or not, overshadows the Palestinian 'diaspora' by claiming to represent their political interests.

¹³¹ See for instance, Daniele Conversi, "Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (9) (2012): 1357-1379; Jolle Demmers, "New Wars and Diasporas: Suggestions for Research and Policy," *Peace, Conflict and Development* 11 (2007): 1-26; Michele Zanini and Sean JA Edwards, *The Networking of Terror in the Information Age*. Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy, eds., John Arquilla and

resources, digital diasporas play an important role in facilitating homeland policy change.¹³² This runs counter to international politics and IR theory, which continues to view Internet technologies largely in terms of what Chourci calls ‘high politics’—as state-based threats. Traditional state-centric models of global politics constrain and bypass the exploration of cyberspace and web-based expressions of politicised identity in favour of supporting public institutions and governing bodies. This is problematic because it fails to acknowledge that local political interests can inspire processes of identity mobilisation and forms of belonging transnationally across various countries of settlement. For example, in the post 2009 defeat of the LTTE, members of the Tamil diaspora have assumed much control over the future of ‘Tamil Eelam’, a concept that now extends beyond the North East and involves the greater transnational community.

Beyond cross-border connective potential, the virtual domain allows dispersed peoples to construct a sense of shared imagination through articulations of collective identity, imagined homelands, political goals and desires for change across and within various countries of settlement.¹³³ This supports my argument that web 2.0 enables the construction of transnational identities and the mobilisation of political activities that remain largely neglected within the field of IR. Although this occurs at a very broad level, examples will be noted in the empirical chapters. For now, it can be seen that Internet connectivity is breeding new diasporic opportunities that clash with IR’s “limited imagination of the political” outside the nation-state.¹³⁴ Pushing for a re-evaluation of mainstream state-centred thinking, I argue that the discipline of IR is growing increasingly stagnant and would greatly benefit from insights from external disciplines that allow for the more expressive power of communicative politics (what IR would refer to as ‘low politics’). As it stands today, IR scholarship approaches the cyber domain as an instrument or a supportive mechanism for offline host-homeland politics, disregarding the ways in which online platforms enhance expressive forms of politics at the grassroots.

David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001). On representations of post 9/11 discourses see: Andrew Hoskins, Akil Awan, and Ben O’Loughlin. *Radicalisation and the Media: Connectivity and Terrorism in the New Media Ecology* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³² Brinkerhoff 2009, 2.

¹³³ Kissau and Hunger 2010, 246.

¹³⁴ Mandaville (2003, 6) develops the concept of translocality, which is meant to explain the ways people flow through space rather than how they exist in space. The approach that I employ in this thesis is more focused on idea articulations as opposed to people.

The literature outlined and discussed above and its inherent shortcomings, offers me a better opportunity to clarify my thesis in terms of what it sets out to achieve. Most importantly, technological innovations in online research methodology mean that we can now explore user-centred interactive networks in more detail and with fewer theoretical limitations. Without Big Data research methods, scholars are unable to fully grasp the relational networks that make up online diasporic representations. In real terms, this means that researchers are forced to go online with a predefined purpose, and manage the endless breadth of networked linkages through preselected sample indicators (one case study, specific actors, locations). Such an approach to research is bound to ultimately skew results. Instead of focusing on the transnational dimensions of diaspora identity politics, such biases end up reinforcing outdated host-homeland territorial logic. By using Big Data research methods, I aim to theorise more accurately on why dispersed populations connect, publicly engage in diaspora politics and disseminate content online. The identity mobilisations and political claims that frame diasporic mobilisations can then be more intricately and objectively examined through a transnational social movement framework.¹³⁵

2.4 Approaching Transnational Global Diaspora Politics

One of my aims in the previous section was to show that displacement from the ancestral homeland is one of many mobilising factors in contemporary diaspora politics. I examined literature on diasporas and the underlying ethos of their position within international politics and relations and concluded that there is an over-reliance on the more traditional lens of enquiry, focusing on triadic networks and ignoring the low politics of the citizen- and group-level interaction. I identified a gap in research and a matching gap in academic studies which omits the comparatively recent upsurge in the use of the web 2.0 Internet technologies as a tool for defining and expanding notions of diaspora as well as a possible source of valuable research given the increasing analytical scope and capabilities of Big Data analysis.

In the digital age, the identity-based bonds that foster new forms of global diaspora politics are being represented, mobilised and transformed online. State-centric (and triadic)

¹³⁵ Literatures on the dynamics of contentious politics and transnational social movements are particularly useful in setting a framework of analysis for online diaspora politics and the mobilisation of diasporic claims: Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).

understandings of diaspora that dominate IR fail to acknowledge the multi-dimensional identity-based political processes being nurtured through user-centred technologies. My focus on the connective opportunities of online networks is an attempt to counter the black-box¹³⁶ territorial traps and problems of methodological nationalism that have until recently constrained in-depth inquiry of diaspora politics to the field of global politics.¹³⁷

By exploring online diasporic representations, I aim to avoid the conceptual traps that inherently constrain analytical focus to the borders and boundaries of the nation-state.¹³⁸ Following Glick Schiller's transnationally scaled approach, I do not view the nation-state as a natural form of socio-political organisation.¹³⁹ Concretely, this means that my investigation does not take national discourse, issue agendas, sentiments of loyalty or histories for granted.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Agnew explains the "territorial trap"¹⁴¹ as the overall tendency in IR and geopolitics to view the nation-state as a self-enclosed container for political and social processes. These scholars also draw attention to the new distributions of power triggered through international migration flows and advances in digital technologies. I extend the logic of this approach to include the view through "ethnic lenses"¹⁴² which would otherwise contain or distort the ability to examine transnational activities exhaustively and with minimal bias. Put differently, we cannot assume that individuals accept or define themselves as a member of a particular diaspora because of their ancestral roots or ethnic origin. The online focus of this thesis therefore serves as a way to separate and disconnect notions of identity with territory in world politics.

Traditional state-centric approaches to international politics also disregard the mutually reinforcing relationship between power and human agency.¹⁴³ Power can be understood, expressed and harnessed through networked communicative processes, which

¹³⁶ Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Agnew 1994. Transnational spaces comprise of combinations of ties and their substances, positions within networks and organisations that cut across the borders of at least two nation states. See also: Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, eds., *Diaspora and transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, IMISCOE Research, 2010).

¹³⁷ Kissau and Hunger 2010, 248.

¹³⁸ Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 308.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 302.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 304.

¹⁴¹ John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics*, (London; New York: Psychology Press, 2003); Sean Carter, "The geopolitics of diaspora," *Area* 37 (1) (2005): 54-63.

¹⁴² Nina Glick Schiller, Ayşe Çağlar and Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen, "Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation," *American Ethnologist* 33 (4) (2006): 612-633.

¹⁴³ Agnew 2003, 55.

according to Agnew include “gaining assent, defining expectations, co-opting others.”¹⁴⁴ The unique identity-based political bonds mobilised online in the name of diasporas offer multiple angles from which to analyse and assess the empowering effects of the web 2.0 on political participation, representation and contestation across online and offline environments. By “liquefying”¹⁴⁵ the physical (non-digitised entities, content and materials), online exchanges invite comparatively expressive forms of cross-border political engagements that are simultaneously both deeply local and digitally global. According to Sassen’s logic, actors constrained by location or domestic roles can become virtual actors in globalised networks without ever having to leave their surroundings.¹⁴⁶ With the help of new technologies, these horizontal formations of identity are less likely to experience top-down restraints, and are able to exist independent of institutional control.¹⁴⁷

2.4.1 Transnational Fields and Spaces of Belonging

A transnational viewpoint favours a more relational approach to the network of connection flows being analysed for this thesis. Global diaspora politics and transnationalism intersect through themes of cross-border mobilisations (the flow of people, ideas and resources). In an effort to distinguish the overlap between these terms, it is worth clarifying that while research on diaspora characteristically builds off aspects of collective identity, studies on transnationalism emphasise patterns of cross-border mobility.¹⁴⁸ My thesis fuses these concepts through its online focus.

This section of the literature review looks at work on the concept of transnationalism, which is often defined as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁵ Sassen 2012, 14. Digitisation is reshaping logics of power by liquefying the physical (non-digital entities/materials) and is unsettling the ‘place-boundedness’ that has traditionally constrained people to territory. It is now possible to be local and global at the same time, see: Castells 2012, 212; Choucri 2012, 221.

¹⁴⁶ Sassen 2012, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Castells 2012, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Transnational spaces, fields and formations are sets of dense, continuous social and symbolic ties encompassing all kinds of social phenomena (Faist 2010, 14–15). Cross-border activities from nongovernmental organisations, protest mobilisations, social movements, migration flows linking countries of origin to countries of settlement are non-linear. In the case of transnational diaspora networks, there may be a contentious struggle (framed in terms of rights) that link local, national and transnational arenas.

stranded social relationships that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”¹⁴⁹ To be transnational is to wilfully embrace living in a world where institutions, notions of power (and their distributions), social, political and public cultures are spread across more than one nation-state.¹⁵⁰ As Levitt asserts, transnationalism “de-emphasizes the role of geography” in processes of identity formation and collective mobilisation, creating new opportunities for cross-border engagement.¹⁵¹ In the digital age, it no longer makes methodological or theoretical sense for studies on diaspora politics to follow the bounds of nation-state containment.

The above definition implies that (im)migrants do not inherently function in a dual territorial host-homeland binary, but are capable of building and contributing to social fields and constructing spaces¹⁵² that transcend multiple geographic, cultural and political boundaries simultaneously. This supports my argument that triadic approaches to diaspora politics stifle our ability to critically examine such dynamic flows, which in their horizontal structure are scattered globally. On this point, Laguerre adds that diaspora politics have outgrown state-centric organising principles that artificially ‘flatten’ migrants into groups and homogenous practices.¹⁵³ While identity-based political bonds and transnational activities may indeed overlap, processes of diasporic mobilisation can no longer be reduced

¹⁴⁹ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (S.I.: Gordon and Breach, 1994), 7.

¹⁵⁰ Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, “The Emergence of a Transnational Social Formation and the Mirage of Return Migration among Dominican Transmigrants,” *Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power* 4 (2) (1997): 310.

¹⁵¹ Ludger Pries, “Configurations of Geographic and Societal Spaces: a Sociological Proposal between ‘Methodological Nationalism’ and the ‘spaces of flows’,” *Global Networks* 5 (2) (2005): 169; Peggy Levitt, “Transnational Migration: Taking Stock and Future Directions,” *Global Networks* 1 (3) (2001): 202. See also: Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, *Towards a Field of Transnational Studies and a Sociological Transnationalism Research Program, Working Paper*, Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organisations (24) (2004); Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, “International Perspectives on Transnational Migration: An Introduction,” *International Migration Review* 37 (3) (2003): 565-575; Steven Vertovec, “Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilisation,” *International Migration Review* 37 (3) (2003): 641-665.

¹⁵² Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society,” *International Migration Review* 38 (3) (2004): 1009. From an anthropological perspective, the concept of ‘transnational social fields’ draws attention to the intricacy of networks that facilitate asymmetrical social relationships in which ideas, practices, and resources are exchanged, organised, re-structured and transformed. A broader way of approaching the transnational is through the sociologically framed concept of transnational social space, which expands outward beyond the individual to consider whole network dynamics. I refer to Pries’ definition of transnational space as “configurations of social practices, artifacts and symbol systems that span different geographic spaces in at least two nation-states without constituting a new ‘deterritorialized’ nation-state”; see Ludger Pries, *The Approach of Transnational Social Spaces: Responding to New Configurations of the Social and the Spatial*, New Transnational Social Spaces, International Migration and Transnational Companies, ed., Ludger Pries (London: Routledge, 2001), 18.

¹⁵³ Michel S. Laguerre, *Diaspora, Politics, and Globalisation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2–3.

to the same contained unit—mainly due to online mobilisation enabled by web 2.0 technology. Essentially there is a difference between ways of being and ways of belonging, and these ways will be explored in this thesis.¹⁵⁴

However, I do not wish to exaggerate the de-emphasis of geographic territory. I consider it more fruitful to focus on the intertwined structural processes that end up linking the local to the global.¹⁵⁵ My aim is not to deflate or detach grassroots geo-political realities from the multi-faceted network linkages mobilised in the name of diaspora. Rather, I argue that Internet connectivity helps decentralise diaspora identity politics and contributes to what Adamson calls “ongoing political transnationalism.”¹⁵⁶

2.4.2 Diaspora Politics and Transnational Mobilisation Processes

By adopting a transnational focus, my thesis not only challenges state-centric triadic approaches to diaspora politics but also introduces analytical frameworks that consider the active practices and mobilisation processes within global politics. In the following sections, I expand upon recent links¹⁵⁷ between global diaspora politics and transnational social movements by adding the concept of web 2.0 connectivity. The Internet is an important tool in diasporic networks because its user-centred ‘networks of networks’ ease connective opportunities for an increasingly diverse set of non-state actors. The agendas and claims that make up contemporary diaspora identity politics are thus becoming much more dynamic than those commonly portrayed in mainstream international politics.

¹⁵⁴ *Ways of being* are understood as the social relations and practices individuals engage in, not the identities linked to their actions. *Ways of belonging* conversely are meant to demonstrate a conscious identification and sense of belonging with a group (identity signifies action), see: Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1010.

¹⁵⁵ Pries (2005, 169) reminds us that spatiality are societal because humans physically and mentally construct them.

¹⁵⁶ Adamson 2012, 31.

¹⁵⁷ See for instance, Martin Sökefeld, “Mobilising in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora,” *Global Networks* 6 (3) (2006): 265-284; Bahar Baser, “The awakening of a latent diaspora: The political mobilisation of first and second generation Turkish migrants in Sweden,” *Ethnopolitics* 13 (4) (2014): 355-376; Maria Koinova, “Sustained vs Episodic Mobilisation among Conflict-Generated Diasporas,” *International Political Science Review* (2015); Amarasingam Amarnath, *Pain, Pride, and Politics: Social Movement Activism and the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Canada* (USA: University of Georgia Press, 2015). On transnational political networks see: Nadjie Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, *Transnationalism, International Migration and Home*, Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home, eds., Nadjie Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (London: Routledge, 2002); Fiona B. Adamson, “Globalisation, transnational political mobilisation, and networks of violence,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18 (1) (2005): 31-49. Diaspora identity politics shares many similarities with transnational social movements, see: Bahar Baser and Ashok Swain, “Stateless Diaspora Groups and Their Repertoires of Nationalist Activism in Host Countries,” *Journal of International Relations* 8 (1) (2010): 42.

Scholars who analyse global diaspora politics as a factor of mobilisation and transnational activism commonly attach a sense of shared or imagined collective identity to dispersed peoples across multiple locales. This approach integrates identity-based sentiments of belonging or memories of (often imagined or idealised) ancestral homelands into social movement frameworks, and acts as a way of distinguishing diasporas from other transnational networks which focus on issues affecting the global commons (such as the environment, international trade policy or nuclear proliferation). For example, Sökefeld posits that diasporic identities are assumed through discursive constructions of a transnationally dispersed sense of imagined community.¹⁵⁸ It is these active constructions and contestations of shared collective identity that distinguish identity-based ‘imagined transnational communities’ from other leaderless transnational formations.¹⁵⁹

From the field of IR, Adamson pushes the study of global diaspora politics beyond triadic cross-border movements in order to consider identity politics as active factors of world politics. Without diminishing potential attachments to real or imagined ancestral homelands, she argues that transnational social movements offer a more systematic framework for analysing processes of contemporary diaspora political mobilisation.¹⁶⁰ The value of these approaches is that they draw attention to the transnational imaginaries that feed reflexive constructions of diaspora identity and diasporic discourses. In my view, these reflexive constructions are expressed mainly online, on digital platforms that help dispersed peoples to connect, substantiate and mobilise sentiments of diasporic belonging, which in their negotiations of host-homeland identities, end up strengthening links between the local and the global.

¹⁵⁸ Sökefeld 2006, 267.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. Key examples: the unresolved Kashmir dispute, the 1984 attack on the Sikh sanctuary the Golden Temple, the Alevis’ lack of recognition in Turkey and the role of the LTTE in fueling transnational sentiments of Tamil ‘nationhood’ as clear indications that agents (re)produce diasporic imaginations and feed mobilisation processes.

¹⁶⁰ See for example: Fiona Adamson, *Mobilising for the Transformation of Home: Politicized Identities and Transnational Practices*, New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home, eds., Nadjé Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (London: Routledge, 2002); Fiona Adamson, *Mechanisms of Diaspora Mobilisation and the Transnationalisation of Civil War*, Transnational Dynamics of Civil War, ed., Jeffrey T. Checkel, Simon Fraser University; Peace Research Institute Oslo; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Adamson 2012.

2.4.3 TANs and Issue Network Mobilisation

The concept of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) pioneered by Keck and Sikkink offers another valuable framework on which to assess the multi-faceted collective identities that link contemporary diaspora mobilisation activities. Transnational networks “promote causes, principled ideas, and norms”, and are organised through relational, “voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchanges.”¹⁶¹ In this networked approach, instrumental goals, shared ideas and values are the agents of motivation, the factors that bind calls to action across borders.¹⁶² While diaspora mobilisation processes do indeed share many of these characteristics, Adamson reminds us that specific identity-based bonds are what distinguish diaspora networks from TANs.¹⁶³

Sentiments of shared collective identity (in ethnic, national or religious terms) and attachments to the ancestral homeland play important roles in reinforcing the transnational bonds that fuel global diaspora politics. New technologies enhance the multidimensionality of networked advocacy structures, offering a simultaneously global and localised communicative platform for diasporic claims and agendas to be disseminated, brokered and leveraged across online and offline environments. Mimicking TANs, instrumental goals (such as demands for justice and reconciliation) and calls to action conflate notions of identity with political interests. Symbolic markers of shared identity intertwine with unresolved grievances and narratives of past trauma as a way of appealing to wider audiences.

To date, much of the work on TANs has focused on interest groups and global civil society in terms of world governance and large-scale public policy impacts.¹⁶⁴ A lot of advocacy is undertaken in human and humanitarian terms, appealing directly to international

¹⁶¹ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8–9, 30.

¹⁶² According to Tarrow transnational activists are “people or groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks and contacts.” Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29.

¹⁶³ Adamson 2012, 32.

¹⁶⁴ According to Adamson (2012), these transnational networks often fixate on liberal universal agendas. See: Paul Wapner, “Politics Beyond the State Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics,” *World Politics* 47 (3) (1995): 311-340; Mary J Peterson, “Transnational Activity, International Society and World Politics,” *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 21 (3) (1992): 371-388; Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier and Marlies Glasius, *Global Civil Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 12.

bodies such as the UN or to NGOs and charities. This is not directly related to diaspora identity politics in theoretical terms, although in real terms inequalities and grievances tend to be part of the agenda for TANs as well as diaspora politics. However, I take parts of the TAN framework (agenda-setting, claims and issue mobilisation) and apply it to the changing nature of identity in global diaspora politics, because they are mutually affecting entities. The work of Charli Carpenter is especially useful in drawing attention to network logics that support both of these transnational mobilisation processes.¹⁶⁵ As in my study, her framework weaves online platforms into IR based scholarship on (leaderless) transnational networks through results obtained by Big Data research methods. Carpenter's online-based research approach also emphasises that web 2.0 technologies can act as independent and intervening variables in international politics.

Carpenter's lengthy exploration of "issue emergence" to some extent informs my work here. My focus on diaspora activity networks serves as a way of acknowledging these important shifts in networked world affairs; technologies are empowering people with the ability to mobilise around identity based political claims. However, I aim to minimise the biases of Big Data research methods by tracing online networks before engaging more directly with non-state actors involved in diaspora politics. The aggregated structure of web 2.0 means that hyperlink interconnections can be used to trace influence and authority between nodes more precisely, without having to reduce analysis to the triadic approach and pre-selected actors (elites, gatekeepers, political entrepreneurs).¹⁶⁶ More importantly, these online explorations will show that contemporary diaspora politics are in no way contained by triadic approaches that essentialise diasporas as a single actor in IR, and power can be seen to be shifting away from authoritarian regimes or even democratically elected governments and into the hands of the individual. In practice, it is the issues and agendas relating to the ancestral homeland¹⁶⁷ and the political identities mobilised in the name of diaspora that are

¹⁶⁵ Key works that helped to guide my study: Charli R. Carpenter, "Setting the Advocacy Agenda: Theorizing Issue Emergence and Nonemergence in Transnational Advocacy Networks," *International Studies Quarterly* 51(1) (2007a): 99-120; Charli R. Carpenter, "Studying Issue (non)-adoption in Transnational Advocacy Networks," *International Organisation* 61 (3) (2007b): 643-667; Charli R. Carpenter and Betsy Jose, "Transnational Issue Networks in Real and Virtual Space: the case of women, peace and security," *Global Networks* 12, (4) (2012): 525-543.

¹⁶⁶ Carpenter 2007a, 113. Scholars should consider the intra and internal network dynamics, emphasising that it is 'political entrepreneurs' who define a problem, and 'gatekeepers' who push issues forward in transnational advocacy arenas (like the cyber domain).

¹⁶⁷ Baser and Swain 2010, 44.

becoming part of world affairs online. With a click of a button or swipe of a smartphone, ordinary people now have the power to momentarily meld their local surroundings with the global polity and communicate with people around the world. Internet web 2.0 technologies help to catapult local conditions and daily experiences into the international arena; these new forms of political expression and contention require greater scholarly attention. This thesis seeks to measure and analyse the spread of such connections in the light of the new web 2.0 technologies.

As it stands today, the discipline of IR has yet to fully acknowledge that new media communication technologies have become the definitive focal point of politics and for political-based research.¹⁶⁸ While beneficial in terms of helping to structure identity-based networked engagements, transnational frameworks remain fixated on large-scale explanations and theories for mobilisations in order to connect principled issues, global civil society and state-based government bodies. This approach concentrates on instrumental mobilisation logic, and still neglects much of the expressive identity-based modes of online engagement that can be equally ‘political’ for actors representing or claiming to represent diasporic interests.

The transnational nature of online diaspora networks unlock the more traditional contained approaches to identity-based diaspora politics. Online platforms can be accessed across multiple locales at any time, and each location represents and maintains its own grounded reality. What was once neatly theorised as homeland or host country based political agendas have now become interwoven within the digital age. We have yet to fully grasp how homeland politics are being impacted by the connective shifts that privilege increasingly mobile and transnationalised forms of political activism in the virtual world.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Charli Carpenter and Daniel W. Drezner, “International Relations 2.0: The Implications of New Media for an Old Profession,” *International Studies Perspectives* 11 (3) (2010): 255-272. Recognising that IR scholars are now starting to view the web as a novel conduit for transnational political mobilisation, the study examines whether online structures correlate and serve as a proxy for offline ‘real-space’ agendas. The role of technologies in mobilisation has been discussed in terms of ‘smart’ mobs and cross-border contention: Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electric Frontier* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc., 1993); Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication and World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹⁶⁹ Lyons and Mandaville 2012, 4.

2.5 Conceptualising Global Diaspora Politics through Social Movements

The conceptual framework of this thesis is based upon the application of analytical tools from social movement literatures to a study of the changing contours of global diaspora politics. Instead of reducing diasporic relations to patterns of migration, my thesis uses Big Data research methods to capture and trace expressions of diaspora identity politics in an online context. These online contexts show a much broader phenomenon of grassroots collective mobilisation which, in the process of linking the local to international politics, transcends the nation-state. Contemporary waves of transnational activism have expanded in terms of both diversity of actors (ordinary people) and geopolitical dynamism that links the local with the global.¹⁷⁰

The Internet offers non-state actors online resources (content, information and knowledge) and connective opportunities, which I argue empower multiple communicative links between local, national and transnational advocacy networks. The user-centred nature of web 2.0 is enabling and supporting new forms collective action, dubbed as “connective action”¹⁷¹ that are fundamentally reshaping world affairs. On this point, Tarrow adds that beyond facilitating modes of communication, Internet technologies exist at the “core of a new movement form.”¹⁷² This means that the Internet is enabling people at the individual level to engage in political action. There is an entire sub-genre of social movement literature emerging that is only tangentially relevant to this thesis, but there are some key points of emphasis that prove useful in situating my approach. The study of global diaspora politics can gain much insight from social movements in terms of networked organisation, collective identities, political opportunities, mobilisation structures and framing processes.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Tarrow 2005, 4. Tarrow describes the concept of ‘internationalism’ as an opportunity structure. Increased horizontal density (across states, governments, non-state actors), vertical links (subnational, national, international levels), and enhanced formal and informal structures facilitate new forms of transnational activism (8-9).

¹⁷¹ See for example: Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Charles Tilly, Douglas McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge; England: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For new forms of ‘connective’ action see: Jeroen van Laer and Peter Van Aelst, “Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires: Opportunities and Limitations,” *Information, Communication & Society* 13 (8) (2010): 1146-1171; Bennett and Segerberg 2012, 2013.

¹⁷² Tarrow 2005, 136.

¹⁷³ Like other scholars I use these concepts to guide my study, see: Baser and Swain 2010, 44; Sökefeld 2006, 269.

2.5.1 Social Movements and Network Logics for Diaspora Mobilisations

According to Della Porta and Diani, social movements can be defined in terms of four key characteristics: informal interaction networks, shared beliefs and solidarity, collective action focusing on some sort of conflict, and the use of protest.¹⁷⁴ The interaction networks are dynamic, which means that actors can change and, depending on the circumstances, may or may not include formal organisations.¹⁷⁵ Beyond externally directed mobilisation activities, self-defined members focus their attention internally to improve modes of organisation, strengthen ideologies, and engage with fellow participants in order to construct a sense of collective identity.¹⁷⁶ While it would be a conceptual stretch to view diasporic mobilisation and social movements as one in the same, both processes follow similar logic. In the digital age, there has been a dramatic rise in personalised politics, or what Castells refers to as a “surge of powerful expressions.”¹⁷⁷

Studies on diaspora identity politics pair well with social movement frameworks because both mobilisation processes often follow leaderless and decentralised structures which have been built upon resource-poor non-state actors and fluctuating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Whether involved in social movements or diaspora politics, Sökefeld contends that agents of change are the factors that streamline mobilisation activities, and they accomplish this via injections of fresh ideas, vocalising demand and instigating new types of action.¹⁷⁸ For example, engaging in protest and demonstrations is not only cost effective, but also allows ordinary people to interact with fellow constituents who share similar opinions, beliefs and/or collective identities.

2.5.2 Notions of Collective Identity

Much like social movements, diaspora mobilisation processes comprise multiple sets of actions, which if aggregated often reinforce feelings of belonging and shared collective

¹⁷⁴ Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 15-16.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. In the past, Diani has defined social movements as “networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.” See: Mario Diani, “The Concept of Social Movement,” *The Sociological Review* 40 (1) (1992): 13.

¹⁷⁶ Tarrow 2011, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Castells 2004, 2.

¹⁷⁸ Sökefeld 2006, 268.

identities between participants.¹⁷⁹ The key difference is that diasporic formations are much more likely to be distinguished by sentiments a transnational ‘imagined’ community as well as a shared collective identity that is linked to a homeland. These attachments vary, but can be based on a shared religion, ethnicity or nationalism—or even sectarian conflict in the real or imagined ancestral homeland, as exemplified by some Irish expatriates in the UK who cling to Catholic or Protestant ideologies and use them as nuclei of collective belonging in an occasionally unwelcoming host country. Understanding how such collective identities are expressed and maintained online is of particular relevance to the study of diaspora identity politics because these transnational mobilisation processes cannot be fully explained by the triadic relational approach.

Polletta and Jasper consider collective identity in terms of cognitive, normative and emotive connections to a broader community, institution, category or form of practice, which may or may not have been experienced first-hand.¹⁸⁰ In this thesis, I bear this definition in mind as a guideline for assessing contemporary forms of diaspora identity politics. Collective identities carry positive connotations and linking emotions between members, and while distinct, can form an aspect of one’s personal identity.¹⁸¹ Such notions of collective identity can also be moulded to express solidarity with grievance narratives and can signify the growth of an ideology or a group of shared interests. In terms of online traffic, website activity and links to and from other websites, this is also important to my study.

Conceptually, one of the key challenges to investigating identity-based phenomena is that we cannot fully account for internal reflexivity or the processes of negotiation and (re)construction that occur between dispersed peoples. As my research focuses primarily on the virtual dimensions of diaspora politics, I view this internal reflexivity as being equally important when considering the new ways in which specific identity markers and ethno-religious grammar are expressed online in terms of website content. This means that I will pay close attention to articulations of collective identity through names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing etc.¹⁸² As discussed in the methodology chapter of this thesis,

¹⁷⁹ della Porta and Diani 2006, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (2001): 285.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

observations from key informant interviews will serve as a complementary process for assessing these articulations of identity.

In addition, I seek to avoid binary assumptions that pit identity-based mobilisations against interest-, strategic- or politically-based movements, as these concepts are not mutually exclusive.¹⁸³ To tighten my analytical framework, I look to Abdelal et al, who set out a two-dimensional approach that differentiates contestation and content in collective identity constructions. *Contestation* is the active process of configuring the meaning of any given collective identity, while *content* is the meaning of that identity.¹⁸⁴ Working with this approach in mind I conclude that collective identities are multifaceted and actively maintained, and should in no way be considered as ‘fixed’ entities or ‘things’. As far as this thesis is concerned, the concept of collective identity is treated as a fluid social category of analysis when considering online diaspora politics.

My research will show that actors involved in online diaspora politics mix cause-based political interests with community-based identity mobilisations. This follows Adamson and Demetriou’s assertion that the study of diasporic phenomena can help us understand identity-based components binding transnational practices with claims-making activities in global politics.¹⁸⁵ Diasporic modes of transnational engagement are unique to international politics because these networks transcend the territorial borders of nation-states, rendering them capable of supporting socio-political and cultural agendas involving the real or imagined ancestral homeland.

The meanings that construct and define collective identity are often clustered through past memories¹⁸⁶, places and overarching goals.¹⁸⁷ As I mentioned earlier, there is a fourth

¹⁸³ Ibid., 298.

¹⁸⁴ Rawi Abdelal Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, “Identity as a Variable,” *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (4) (2006): 696-700. Content of collective identity are described in four ways: constitutive norms (‘rules’ defining group membership), social purposes (goals that are shared by members of a group), relational comparisons with other social categories (the way it views other identity groups), cognitive models (worldviews pol/material conditions, interests shaped by particular identity) Proposing/shaping meanings of group. “identities are contested....identity language can be used strategically.

¹⁸⁵ Adamson and Demetriou 2007, 496.

¹⁸⁶ On the renegotiation and re-articulation of past memories see key literatures: Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (United States of America: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁸⁷ Castells 2004, 2.

aspect to diaspora studies—a temporal one—an imagined past to which people attach memories, an idyllic vision of a world that may never have existed. This aspect too may become politicised, and may also act as a generational point of cleavage, from which younger generation diaspora members break away from traditional memories of a homeland they never experienced. This may breed resentments¹⁸⁸ within the diaspora, but in any case helps to support claims in my research that a diaspora is not a cohesive whole. However, as Tarrow explains, common purposes often guide collective challenges.¹⁸⁹ Analytical concepts from social movement literatures¹⁹⁰ help to draw attention to the transnational (identity, activity, issue based) networks that connect political agendas and claims between various countries of settlement and ancestral homelands. Here, I am specifically referring to three interrelated factors labelled as *mobilising structures*, *political opportunities* and *framing processes*. These concepts are used to underline the fact that diaspora identity politics are actively constructed through strategies and tactics, in which knowledge (the ability to shape, control, use information) becomes a form of power in itself.¹⁹¹ This ‘fourth dimension’ is an important factor of understanding diaspora construction, identity and mobilisation, and in itself would support a fruitful area for future research.

2.5.3 Examining Diaspora Politics through a Social Movement Framework: Key Concepts

Mobilising structures are commonly associated with the work of McAdam et al, who define the concept as “collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilise and engage in collective action.”¹⁹² The concept draws attention to meso-scale dynamics, focusing on groups, organisations, and networks that play an empowering role in mobilisation processes. Formal mobilising structures include centres of learning, places of worship, organisations, community centres and other institutions, while informal structures are understood to be more open-ended (friendship circles and activist networks). These

¹⁸⁸ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹⁸⁹ Tarrow 2011, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David S. Meyer and Sidney G. Tarrow, *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

¹⁹¹ Choucri 2012, 71.

¹⁹² McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 3.

organisations are important because they offer “temporal continuity”; by maintaining this stability they are more permanently committed to causes and agendas than individual actors.¹⁹³

Ethno-religious institutions play an important background/administrative role in diaspora mobilisation processes as well. Here, I am referring to specific religious institutions (Temples, Churches, Mosques, Gurdwaras and Synagogues) that reinforce sentiments of transnational community and shared collective identity across countries of settlement and the ancestral homeland. These institutions act as social and cultural hubs for self-defined members, but can also offer a stable framework for more informal offshoot networks of engagement. At the same time, youth populations may be attend university or interest-specific mobilising structures and groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam which are spread across different locales, transparent, progressive and issue-centric. Mobilising structures facilitate diverse modes of diasporic engagement and “create and sustain discourses of community” that connect the local to the global.¹⁹⁴

Mobilising structures can also include “social networks of everyday life”¹⁹⁵ which in contemporary times include online platforms. The heterogeneity of diasporic perspectives only multiplies when we consider the user-centred nature of modern Internet technologies. As a mobilising structure, the web facilitates cross-border ties and can be used to express identity and to coordinate calls to action. These communicative technologies empower activists with resources to recruit and interact with individuals interested in similar issues and encourage polyadic (rather than dyadic) engagement dynamics.¹⁹⁶

It would make sense to apply McAdam et al.’s definitions to the virtual world. Cyberspace can be considered as a repository for both high and low politics when considering the degree to which online platforms empower individual communication and political expression as well as organisation and mobilisation for action.¹⁹⁷ Networks facilitate not only the high politics of national interest and security but also more contentious forms of diaspora politics by connecting various locales to world affairs—strengthening linkages

¹⁹³ Sökefeld 2006, 269.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 270.

¹⁹⁵ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, p. 14

¹⁹⁶ Mario Diani, “Social Movement Networks Virtual and Real,” *Information, Communication & Society* 3 (3) (2000): 388.

¹⁹⁷ Choucri 2012, 15.

between individual participants of transnational coalitions.¹⁹⁸ These mechanisms of mobilisation link participants virtually, empowering ordinary people with a connective platform to collaborate across borders with greater autonomy. As a mobilising structure, the web is more efficient in financial and user-friendly terms than previous incarnations of online engagement such as dial up Internet or mobile technology, and promotes collective identity (cross-posting shared grievances) while helping to foster a sense of community by reinforcing on-the-ground structural networks.¹⁹⁹

Political opportunities help explain structural or institutional settings that nurture mobilisations of social movement. For example, it would be overly reductionist to assume that all diasporic processes of mobilisation automatically intertwine and build upon narratives of grievance. Tarrow explains that political opportunities are dynamic and can just as easily be enabled, disabled or constrained to discourage contention.²⁰⁰ Political opportunity structures are non-static, and are defined by the surrounding environments that motivate people to mobilise or engage in collective action by suggesting impending success or failure.²⁰¹

Looking outward, external socio-political conditions play a role in fuelling more public expressions and the communication of contentious issues. I view this as extremely important to the study of contemporary diaspora politics because it sheds light on socio-political conditions in countries of settlement that help feed mobilisation processes. Countries of settlement that promote democratic principles and liberal values also provide more open opportunities in which identity-based political agendas and claims of injustice can become issues of wider domestic or even global interest. A notable example of this has been Sikh Turban advocacy post 9/11, where diasporic actors have led many online campaigns, disseminating procedural information to airports and governing authorities (TSA). Online campaigns also strive to educate Turban wearing Sikhs about their rights to private screening

¹⁹⁸ Diani 2000, 388.

¹⁹⁹ Kelly R Garrett, "Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs," *Information, Communication & Society* 9 (2) (2006): 203-4.

²⁰⁰ Meyer and Tarrow 1998, 20. See McAdam et al. (1996, 27), offer a more structured approach to political opportunity through four key dimensions: openness/closure of institutionalised political system, stability/instability of elite alignments, absence/presence of elite allies, the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

²⁰¹ Meyer and Tarrow 1998, 85.

at Canadian and American airports. Baser and Swain assert that many stateless diasporas transport homeland struggles for secession and statehood to countries of settlement by engaging in localised mobilisation activities.²⁰² Political opportunities in countries of settlement also encourage migrant communities to establish diaspora organisations more readily as a way to formalise a presence in the host country.²⁰³

Peaceful forms of collective action (protests, demonstrations, flyer distribution) are widely accepted in liberal democracies such as Canada, the US and the UK. While political opportunities may vary between countries of settlement, it is important to note that many ‘immigrant’-friendly countries legally protect the right to peaceful protest. Political issue agendas from the homeland are comparatively easier to situate in countries of settlement—and are also comparatively easier to promote online. For example, the Canadian ‘Charter of Rights and Freedom’, provides citizens with political opportunities because it guarantees fundamental rights (freedom of religion, thought, belief, expression, press, assembly, association). Similar legal assurances are also enshrined in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The transnational nature of diaspora network linkages means that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights plays a particularly important role in structuring political opportunities and empowering mobilisation frameworks between dispersed peoples.

Framing Processes become more complex in diasporic contexts, because online issue agendas increasingly mix individual notions of identity with collective political interests. Framing is broadly defined through people’s “conscious strategic efforts” to devise common understandings of the world in relation to themselves and their place in it with the intention of legitimising calls to action.²⁰⁴ Actors involved in global diaspora politics benefit from the online development of issue-based “interpretative packages”²⁰⁵ that have the potential to mobilise not only participant community members but also wider audiences. Contemporary

²⁰² Baser and Swain 2010, 42.

²⁰³ Ibid., 36.

²⁰⁴ McAdam et al. 1996, 6. Key framing literatures see: David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilisation, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review* (1986): 464-481; David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilisation,” *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1) (1988): 197-217.

²⁰⁵ Polletta and Jasper 2001, 291.

diaspora identity politics are more likely to ‘stick’ and become part of global politics when principles of human rights²⁰⁶ are employed to gain legitimacy from the international community.

Compared to situation-specific paradigms (the Cold War frame, exploited worker frames and anti-globalisation frames for example), master frames are wider in scope and flexible enough to be adopted and articulated by and act as templates for a diverse range of actors, causes and movements.²⁰⁷ Snow and Benford clarify that when key events become defining issues in grievance claims, they can potentially become ‘important’ enough to justify large-scale calls to action.²⁰⁸ The US civil rights movement of the 1960s is credited as the initial rights-based master frame or template due to its success in promoting equal rights and opportunities for African Americans. This rights-based master frame has been widely adopted and modified to fit numerous identity-based movements since that time.²⁰⁹

It would make strategic sense that identity-based diasporic claims of injustice would also cluster into rights-based master framing processes, especially online. These comparably adaptable human rights-based master frames further emphasise the growing limitations of the essentialist/primordial focus that relies on static triadic contained models for diaspora identity politics. Contemporary diaspora politics is an ideal way to understand why and how certain issue agendas gain international traction or appear more visibly global compared to others. For example, specific diasporic grievance narratives associated with traumatic dispersal (conflict driven displacement, refugee issues), internal persecution (civil wars, allegations of war crimes, genocide), religious freedoms and hate crimes associated with articles of faith can all be (re)framed as human rights issues.

²⁰⁶ Clifford Bob has written extensively on the persuasive nature of human rights, and why certain claims of injustice resonate with international audiences with greater success. See: Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Clifford Bob, *The International Struggle for New Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁰⁷ Robert D Benford, *Master Frame*, The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements, eds., David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

²⁰⁸ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, *Master Frames and Cycles of Protest*, Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, eds., Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 139. Other movements to employ the rights-based frame include American Indian, women’s, LGBTQ, racial/ethnic, animal, abortion, student movements. See also: Meyer and Tarrow 1998, 117–122.

The approach that I take with reference to the role of human rights-based²¹⁰ discourse in global diaspora politics is informed by Carpenter's detailed exploration of "issue emergence".²¹¹ Horizontal "network power"²¹² dynamics enable new non-state actors to bypass elite political entrepreneurs and initiate what Keck and Sikkink call the "boomerang effect."²¹³ Resource poor non-state actors directly or indirectly involved in diaspora politics can strategically diffuse content online, using the universal language of human rights to publicise struggles and direct their claims to external bodies (governments, organisations like Oxfam or institutions like the UN).

From a strategic standpoint, human rights frames are more likely to resonate with a wider audience because these principles are ingrained into the socio-political fabric of numerous (democratic) host countries as well as international institutions like the UN. I argue that specifically because of these framing processes, diaspora identity politics are more likely to become part of global politics. Snow and Benford assert that the mobilisation potency of a frame largely depends on three interdependent factors: empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and ideational centrality (narrative fidelity).²¹⁴ Put differently, issues diagnosed as problematic benefit from evidence-based documentation, direct first-hand experiences and narratives built upon beliefs, myths or folktales that stir emotions. As such, many political agendas and grievance claims framed as human rights violations have their roots in the ancestral homeland.

²¹⁰ Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Kenneth Thompson, "Border Crossings and Diasporic Identities: Media Use and Leisure Practices of an Ethnic Minority," *Qualitative Sociology* 25 (3) (2002): 409-418.

²¹¹ Carpenter 2007, 103. In her study on children and armed conflict (CaAC) agenda networks, Carpenter seeks to understand why some issues gain greater international attention compared to others. She argues that while the success and failures of TANs have been studied in depth we do not know much about "issue emergence".

²¹² For IR based discussion on network power see: Emile M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organisation* 63 (3) (2009): 559-592. Hafner-Burton et al. define networks as "sets of relations that form structures which in turn may constrain and enable agents" adding that "dark networks" include terror or criminal activity (560).

²¹³ The 'boomerang effect' – when local movements or groups/actors/individuals attempt to bypass their (unresponsive) state authorities in favor of external bodies, international allies and TANs who may bring pressure from the outside (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 12–13). Giving the example of the graphic death of Neda Agha-Soltani, Carpenter (2010, 260) points out that YouTube is now routinely used to transmit videos (camera-witnessing) in order to provoke interest and outrage. This is also discussed in Barbie Zelizer's *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²¹⁴ Snow and Benford 1992, 140–1.

Between first-hand experience and imagined constructions, the boundaries surrounding what we define as ‘being diasporic’ are constantly in flux. Identity constructions are inherent in the framing processes,²¹⁵ and the analytical lens used to study online diaspora politics seeks to capture how framing tactics liquefy grievances experienced at grassroots levels and invite new meanings that motivate calls to action. This adds yet another conceptual layer of complexity to the political mobilisation of diasporas because we are unable to pinpoint how specific homeland attachments and imagined transnational belongings are actively negotiated within broader universalist human rights-based online networks. As can be ascertained from the above, an individual’s ability to trigger emotional responses virtually from audiences is fast becoming a key form of power in today’s digital age. Concepts from social movement theory draw attention to new battlefronts of power and influence: the minds of everyday people.²¹⁶ This approach to studying global diaspora politics presents an incredibly interesting case of leaderless, stateless, non-institutionalised formations that are now taking on roles of identity in world affairs through online mobilisations.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced key literatures that I have used to fully situate my contribution to the study of global diaspora politics. I have discussed more traditional approaches to diasporic study and explained why their relevance is dwindling in the modern world. My analysis is primarily focused on tracing and uncovering the supportive and enabling qualities of the online community in identity mobilisation processes. This literature review section has explored new approaches to identity mobilisation and has also introduced approaches from other parallel disciplines which has helped situate and inform the interdisciplinary research included in this thesis. The research approach I employ in this thesis to study online diaspora politics directly opposes the triadic relational model, which I contend is becoming increasingly limited. My research also explores new and de-centralised structures and new approaches using methodology from a variety of disciplines which will be outlined in the following chapter. As such, the background literature has to be extremely rigorous if it is

²¹⁵ Robert Benford and David Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology*. (26) (2000): 632.

²¹⁶ Castells 2012, 168.

expected to provide a supportive framework for my thesis. By looking through a transnational lens, I consider online platforms to act as an open-source pathway or channel to disseminate and retrieve information, construct knowledge and create awareness around political agendas and grievance claims that fall through the cracks of state-centric approaches to IR and global politics. Lastly, a mobilisation-led approach to global diaspora politics serves to underscore a significant shift in the dynamics of power that connect different locales to international politics from the bottom up. The online focus of this thesis and the methods I will use as a basis for analysis will be discussed in detail in the methodological chapter that follows.

III.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological Approach and Research Design

To investigate the way technology is affecting the changing contours of global diaspora politics, the methodological design of this thesis triangulates data from digital mapping, web-based content analysis and key respondent interviews. The approach captures and traces the political implications of web-based activities by mapping the online identity politics of three stateless diasporas—the Sikhs, the Tamils and the Palestinians.²¹⁷ For methodological coherence, the research design was employed sequentially, beginning online with digital mapping techniques before moving on to web-based content analysis and finally to actor interviews, all of which are presented in the case study chapters below.

However, it is of utmost importance that the logic of the research design employed for this thesis be adequately explained and contextualised. This chapter therefore begins with an explanation of the comparative case study approach put forward in the study. This is followed by a discussion of the primary research space: the world wide web, the online-offline nexus and the benefits of virtual ethnography in guiding the focus of inquiry. The chapter concludes with a significant discussion on the complexities of Internet based research (IBR) ethics, and an analysis of my reflexive position as the researcher and author of this thesis.

3.2 Why a Comparative Case Study Approach?

The thesis undertakes a comparative case study approach by exploring Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics as represented through the corpora of the e-Diasporas Atlas. The atlas project was used as a tool to guide the web-based content analysis and semi-

²¹⁷ I recognise that individuals directly and indirectly involved within these virtual network structures may not define themselves as diaspora members, but they may, through their political interests, interlink with prominent themes and issues that form global diaspora politics.

structured interviews to form a triangulated methodology which will be discussed shortly. A multi-case study approach is beneficial because it allows commonalities and differences to emerge between cases without necessarily compromising the methodological validity or the reliability of the overall study.²¹⁸ In contrast to a single case study, a multi-case approach allows for a cross comparison of the dominant activities, issues and identities that play a key role in binding online ‘diasporic’ formations.²¹⁹ Whether through Palestinian film festival networks, online commemorative archives such as ‘Sikh Museum: preserving a people’s heritage’²²⁰ or even the viral responses stemming from Channel 4’s ‘Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields’, each of the cases selected for my research assumes at least some sort of identity-infused presence online.

To be clear, the comparative case study approach of this thesis uses the “method of difference”/“method of agreement” logic.²²¹ As opposed to a ‘most similar system design’ that often uses smaller-*n* samples, I used a ‘most different system design’ to steer my three case studies. I did this because I wanted to avoid being causally deterministic in my online observations and evaluation of the impact of web 2.0 on diaspora identity politics. The ‘most different system design’ is a particularly useful way of integrating the smaller-*n* case study (Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian) component of the thesis with the larger-*n* (1026) website sample obtained from the e-Diasporas Atlas corpus mapping exercise.

Case study analysis as beneficial for explanatory studies that look to answer questions of *how* and *why* in particular.²²² During the initial virtual ethnography stages of the study, I found myself often asking *why* people involved in diaspora politics would go online in the first place, and whether these motivations were personal and/or political. On this point, it is important to consider *how* the cyber domain is supporting and enhancing new expressive

²¹⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 47. Trending patterns surrounding online engagement also increase validity. With causal links and validity in mind, this may translate into far more reliable assessments or what Yin calls “results” (i.e.: transnational diaspora narratives) and “reasons” (i.e.: how grievances are framed and received).

²¹⁹ Gerring defines a case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (2004: 342). Units in this context are bounded; examples include the nation state, a revolution, a political party, an election, or a person. Populations and subjects in this vein are considered as samples. See: John Gerring, “What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?” *American Political Science Review* 98 (2) (2004): 341-354.

²²⁰ “Sikh Museum – Preserving a People’s Heritage,” Last accessed August 2, 2014. <www.sikhmuseum.com>

²²¹ Van Evera 1997, 57. On ‘Mill’s methods see: John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, ed., J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

²²² See: Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 2003).

forms of identity politics—and to what effect. Even so, I was aware that a common criticism of case studies is one of subjectivity. The validity of empirical data can often come into question when the researcher subjectively chooses case studies.²²³ I used a ‘most different system design’ specifically to avoid reducing diasporas to single units of analysis. My objective was to contribute a more empirically rigorous exploration of the online-based aspects of diasporic identity mobilisation. Using data from three different cases, my intention was to show that the methodological and theoretical assumptions guiding actor-based or triadic-led approaches to diaspora politics are becoming far too generalised and limited in modern times.

In a very broad sense, there are notable similarities between Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian diaspora groups. There is a historic connection to the British Empire and legacies of colonialism that touch each of these cases differently.²²⁴ In the Sikh and Tamil cases, past scholarship²²⁵ has revealed a significant mobilisation of support both financially or through diplomatic, social and religious channels. The Palestinian case shares this similarity, and scholars have noted a significant deployment of the Palestinian diasporic identity as a means of gaining international support.²²⁶

Perhaps most obvious is the fact that these case studies are considered ‘stateless’ diasporas; and therefore can be regarded as ‘leaderless’ in terms of official government organisation or institutional capacity. These specific cases fit into what Sheffer distinguishes as “stateless” diasporas (broadly described as migrant groups not connected to a sovereign state). “Stateless” diasporas differ from “state-linked” diasporas in that they may have never had a sovereign homeland state in territorial form, they may have lost their homeland, and/or their homeland may lack clearly defined boundaries.²²⁷ In this triadic way of thinking, stateless diasporas are considered likelier to have maintained primordial-based connections,

²²³ Helen Simons, *Case Study Research in Practice* (London: Sage publications, 2009), 24.

²²⁴ Key examples include: the 1917 Balfour Declaration and post-war Britain’s handing of the Palestine issue to the newly formed United Nations in 1947 (UN Resolution 181 in 1947). The early ‘Sikh diaspora’ of the 1890s, where Sikhs played a crucial role in constructing railways in British East Africa. The Independence of India from British rule in 1947, and the Partition of Punjab (the Sikh homeland). The Sinhalese resenting British favoritism expressed towards the Tamil minority prior to independence of Ceylon (then Sri Lanka) in 1948.

²²⁵ Christine C. Fair, “Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 11 (1) (2005): 125-156.

²²⁶ Luxshi Vimalarajah and Rudhramoorthy Cheran, “Empowering Diasporas: The Dynamics of Post-War Transnational Tamil Diaspora,” *Occasional Paper*, Berghof Conflict Research, (31) (2010): 12.

²²⁷ Baser and Swain 2010, 38; Sheffer 2003, 148.

because grievances related to displacement remain a key factor in the mindset of the dispersed.²²⁸ This is particularly the case when “nationalist” groups supporting secessionist attempts call for self-determination or ongoing conflicts in the homeland and mobilise across host countries.²²⁹

By selecting these stateless case studies, we can better evaluate how identity and interest-based mobilisations aggregate and conflate online. We can also assess the extent to which web-based representations reify essentialist or primordial understandings of diasporas (as homeland orientated groups) that continue to dominate international relations and world politics more broadly. For example, while actor-based or triadic relational models explain diasporic identity as non-static, these approaches also view the homeland (in this case an imagined one) as essential to the maintenance of the collective identity, political orientation and activities of “stateless diasporas”.²³⁰ The aim is not to discount the symbolic importance of the imagined homeland, but rather to show that diasporic identity represents much more than homeland identity politics. To do this, I compare data obtained from e-Diaspora corpus maps, online content analysis and key respondent interviews across the three case studies. I use an online-led comparative case study approach to obtain the evidence²³¹ necessary to show the weaknesses of and challenge pre-existing approaches to contemporary diaspora politics.

By using a most different system design I aim to shed light on the rise of global diaspora politics as increasingly salient matters of world affairs. The triangulated methodology (corpus maps, webCA, interviews) put forth in this thesis will highlight similar online patterns between the three cases. Not only does web 2.0 invite more expressive politics in the form of diasporic identity-based activities, the platform also allows actors to redress, latch on and frame grievance narratives, issue-agendas and political claims as not just diasporic problems, but as human rights issues affecting international politics.

I selected Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian cases because of their socio-political relevance within prominent immigration hubs²³² (Canada, the US and the UK). These locations have

²²⁸ Ibid., Sheffer 2003, 153.

²²⁹ Ibid., Sheffer 2003, 149.

²³⁰ Sheffer 2003, 149.

²³¹ Van Evera 1997, 54.

²³² Sheffer 2003, 156. Sheffer explains Palestinians and the Sikhs “stateless diasporas” as more active groups, to which I would add the Tamil case which has a strong history of militant and nationalist connections between

emerged as key migration hotspots for Tamil and Sikh migrants in particular. In the Palestinian case, the increased internationalisation of the Palestinian cause has been witnessed in various public protests and calls to action in numerous major cities (London, New York, Paris).²³³ Compared to the Tamil and Sikh cases, the Palestinians have a much longer history of mobilising grievance narratives and political claims as important international issues.²³⁴ Hence, while these stateless diaspora groups can be said to share some general similarities, they do differ significantly in terms of history, dispersion/migration patterns (voluntary, conflict driven with refugee issues), community focal points (local temples), and local-global links across countries of settlement and the ancestral homeland (imagined).

Online diaspora advocacy networks can take many forms, from cultural reproduction and the reconciliation of past traumas to unresolved quests for national autonomy and self-determination. As discussed in the empirical chapters of this thesis, each of the stateless diasporas have mobilised around various secessionist attempts and calls for the right to self-determination, and have garnered significant attention from the international community and mainstream media in recent times. However, consistent across each of these cases is a desire for change, transformation or betterment that binds various countries of settlement to the (imagined) homeland.

Resource poor actors directly and indirectly involved in contemporary diaspora politics can use new technologies to become more visible (and therefore less neglected) in mainstream international politics. In each of three case studies, I seek to uncover relational host-homeland differences to allow for better understanding of the various ways that the web enables and supports diasporic mobilisation processes globally. A major strength of comparative case study research design is that it pairs well with mixed methodology and data collection techniques.²³⁵ This will allow for an online-based “axes of comparison”²³⁶ which sets my study apart from previous scholarship on contemporary diaspora politics that go

various host countries and North East Sri Lanka. He also cites the US, Canada, Britain and Western Europe and key diasporic hotspots.

²³³ Several protests in various European city centers can be traced through the hashtag #SolidarityWaveBDS.

²³⁴ Sheffer 2003, 151. Even before the digital age, (since the 1970s) “Palestinians have forced their issue onto the international agenda.”

²³⁵ Simons 2009, 24–5.

²³⁶ Stuart Cunningham, “Popular Media as Public ‘sphericules’ for Diasporic Communities,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (2) (2001): 135. Axes of comparison are most commonly generational, ethnicity, homeland, education and class recency of arrival and conditions of migration

online with a purpose or end up focusing on a handful of actors or locations. As I will explain in the forthcoming sections of this chapter, the data triangulation²³⁷ approach (corpus mapping, web content analysis, interviews) employed in this thesis traces online-offline interconnections without being causally or technologically deterministic.

3.3 The Research Space and Web 2.0

The user-centred characteristics of web 2.0 technologies present almost limitless research opportunities, inspiring much “methodological imagination” for scholars of contemporary global politics and policymakers.²³⁸ This is because new technologies are becoming far more user friendly and ubiquitous in modern times. They can be harnessed by everyday people who share content, present opinions and reflect on a variety of world issues with significantly greater ease than ever before. Concretely, innovative uses of new technologies as social artefacts means that methodologies in social science research must too develop innovative approaches to study new political phenomenon. Kearney reminds us that in today’s digital age, deterritorialisation is more about the ways in which production, consumption, communities, politics and identity become detached from place-specific localities.²³⁹ In this section, I provide an overview of the key attributes and defining features of current online platforms. I compare web 1.0 and 2.0 platforms, and explain why the distinction matters in the context of identity politics.

3.3.1 Defining Web 2.0

Popularised by Tim O’Reilly (of O’Reilly Media), it was only after a conference brainstorming session with MediaLive International in 2004, that the term web 2.0 entered

²³⁷ Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis, *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 43. According to Ritchie and Lewis “[t]riangulation involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data” – it is a common way qualitative research methods validate findings.

²³⁸ Christine Hine, *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet* (Oxford; New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 1.

²³⁹ Michael Kearney, “The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalisation and Transnationalism,” *Annual review of Anthropology* 24 (19) (1995): 552.

the public domain.²⁴⁰ Initially a tech-industry buzzword, the term was primarily used for marketing purposes. Much has changed since then. Today, the web refers to web 2.0—online platforms defined by user-centred content, where ordinary people as users can generate online content. While there remains a lack of consensus on the exact definition of web 2.0, there are a handful of concepts (user-centred content, participatory platform, networked communication) that continue to resurface when tech experts, academics, and non-academics discuss the term. The overall definitional ambiguity of web 2.0 can be attributed to the complexity and openness of online platforms. The growing ease of access and usability of this new technology remains a key distinguishing feature.

Web 2.0 is participatory by nature because it is a user-generated network and is not defined by specific boundaries. Instead, online platforms function through interrelated network linkages—what O'Reilly explains as “gravitational cores” tied together through a set of principles and practices.²⁴¹ He uses the metaphor of a real solar system of sites that vary in distance from that core. Web 2.0 is a “network as platform”, and extends globally through connected devices (computer, laptops, smartphones, tablets).²⁴² Fuchs et al conceptualise web 2.0 in a similar vein, as a “techno-social system” where human beings (as Internet users) interact using the technological networks that link a wide range of devices (computers, tablets, smartphones).²⁴³

Beyond the technical levels, these interconnections shed light on the interactive social aspects of the web 2.0. Online platforms are dynamic and flexible because they function through a decentralised logic that relies on users and active participation. When we use our computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones to go online or surf the web and share or engage with content, we are participating. This user-centred design is not only an essential feature of current online platforms, but also encapsulates the main structural difference between older web 1.0 (content consumption) and more recent web 2.0 (content creation) technologies.

²⁴⁰ First coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999, the term ‘web 2.0’ only became popular after the 2004 Web 2.0 Conference held in San Francisco, California.

²⁴¹ Tim O'Reilly, “What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software,” *Communications & Strategies* 1 (2007): 18.

²⁴² O'Reilly 2007, 17.

²⁴³ Christian Fuchs, Wolfgang Hofkirchner, Matthias Schafranek, Celina Raffl, Marisol Sandoval, and Robert Bichler, “Theoretical foundations of the Web: cognition, communication, and co-operation. Towards an understanding of Web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0,” *Future Internet* 2 (1) (2010): 48.

3.3.2 Distinguishing Web 2.0 from Web 1.0

The first version of the web (1.0) emerged in the early 1990s, and was later absorbed into current web 2.0 platforms. It is important to note that because these processes are now user-centred, they are ongoing, and lack any sort of foreseeable or definitive end point. It is difficult to determine exactly when web 1.0 ended and web 2.0 began because online platforms are in a constant state of flux, and networks build upon one another, which makes it extremely challenging to pinpoint an exact date of technological transition. Moving from web 1.0 to web 2.0 (and onwards to 3.0) requires acknowledging a fundamental change in the “architecture of participation”²⁴⁴; the social component of the online community has expanded. The shift to web 2.0 is therefore best understood as a gradual process in which the interactive capabilities of Internet technology were improved to make online platforms more open, accessible and user-friendly. In the context of this thesis, these widened connective opportunities denote a fundamental shift in power and influence. With web 2.0, ordinary people from all walks of life obtained the ability to express their opinions online and engage publicly with greater ease and autonomy than ever before.

Key Differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

| Web 1.0 | Web 2.0 |
|--|---|
| Web 1.0 is computer based (Log into Internet) | Web 2.0 is a platform (Devices connected to Internet) |
| Top-down information dissemination, one-way communication | Multi-level, asynchronous, limitless interactivity, two-way communication |
| Transactions (companies, client servers) | Relational (communities, peer to peer) |
| Mostly read-only | Dynamic read-write |
| Owning content | Sharing content |
| Users consume content | Users consume, create, enrich content |
| Content is text-based (few images) | Rich multimedia content (text, images, video) |
| Pull info - Email listserv, bookmarks, favourites are manually checked by user | Push info – custom automatic RSS (Rich Site Summary) feeds, channels issue-specific information updates to user |
| Passive | Active |

²⁴⁴ O'Reilly 2007, 17.

Media scholar, blogger and digital activist Ethan Zuckerman notes that because web 2.0 is significantly easier to use, it empowers everyday people with tools to share, create, debate, and mediate content for wider local and global audiences. He writes, “[w]eb 1.0 was invented to allow physicists to share research papers. Web 2.0 was created to allow people to share pictures of cute cats.”²⁴⁵ This polarised summation may appear extreme, but it captures very accurately the paradigm shift that has led to web 2.0 technologies increasingly being used for social and cultural purposes. The transnational scale of these online networks are capable of transcending and bypassing vertical approaches to IR that often contain politics or conceptions of power to the nation-state. Zuckerman reasons that the web tools and applications used for everyday ‘cute cat’ sharing are also being used by a smaller number of individuals for activist purposes.²⁴⁶ I extend this argument to consider diasporic forms of contentious politics that are enabled and supported by web 2.0 online platforms.

3.4 The Online-Offline Nexus

In designing the research for this thesis, much emphasis was placed on contextualising the relationship between the online and the offline (ground conditions)—two spaces which until recently were largely treated as separate entities. Kozinets, a pioneer of commercial Internet ethnography, (‘netnography’), comments, “the Internet is a very strange, even surreal, space in which to be conducting research because of the medium’s profound effects on human identity and sense of place.”²⁴⁷

The research design of this thesis follows an inductive approach as a means of tracing power relations; it seeks to analytically uncover the relationships between online and offline diasporic mobilisation processes. The online and offline communities are mutually intertwined, and rely upon open and public participation.²⁴⁸ The two-way (bi-directional) interactive nature of online content dissemination differs significantly from conventional media platforms (radio, newspaper, television), which largely rely on a top-down content

²⁴⁵ See: Martha McCaughey, *Introduction: Cyberactivism 2.0: Studying Cyberactivism a Decade into the Participatory Web*, *Cyberactivism on the Participatory Web*, ed., Martha McCaughey (New York, NY : Routledge, 2014), 1. Zuckerman coined the ‘cute cat theory of digital activism’ in 2008 as a way to explain the lower costs of engagement online, and the growing mundane uses of the web.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Robert V. Kozinets, “On Netnography: Initial reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 25 (1) (1998): 368.

²⁴⁸ John Postill and Sarah Pink, “Social Media Ethnography: The Digital Researcher in a Messy Web,” *Media International Australia* 145 (1) (2012): 124.

dissemination approach, distinguishing the producers of content from the audiences that receive and consume it. The web, on the other hand, is built upon non-linear, user-centred network linkages, which are sustained and expanded upon through engagements that are asynchronous, meaning these interactions occur at different times. Power and influence are crowd-sourced between online users that produce and consume content. For example, YouTube vloggers gain attention and popularity through likes, shares, and subscribers—signifying a far more interactive and dependant relationship between online producers and consumers. Rather, web 2.0 is built on a system of logic that follows the flow of aggregates (sharing and linking content), and communicative relational patterns between different users and their individual devices spread across the world.

For example, we can consider the standardisation of smartphone technologies as clear indication of the growing ubiquity of the Internet in the digital age. Through camera-witnessing²⁴⁹ mobile technologies like smartphones (including apps) can be used for connective action, blurring the lines between what is deemed as user-centred content and what is agenda setting or newsworthy. This means that people with smartphones can share and publicise their surrounding ground-realities with greater ease. Graphic video and unfiltered images of repression, violence, and brutality can be used to mobilise and produce emotional reactions, feelings of outrage or political solidarity on an international stage. User-centred interactions characteristic of the web inherently transcend conventional top-down information/content dissemination hierarchies. Online representations from well-established organisations, informal advocacy groups and everyday individuals now possess equal ability to delineate what is understood as legitimate news or knowledge.

²⁴⁹ See: Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, “Citizen camera-witnessing: Embodied political dissent in the age of ‘mediated mass self-communication’,” *New Media & Society* 16 (5) (2014): 753-769. There has been a rise in citizen-led by-standard journalism, mobilised into social activism and protest movements. Key examples in the past few years have been the ‘Arab Spring’ in Tahrir Square, the violent end of the Sri Lankan civil war in Channel 4’s ‘Killing Fields’ shot entirely through the lens of camera-phones, the death of Neda Agha-Soltan in Iran (Zelizer 2010), the steady rise of alleged police brutality in the U.S towards African American men which has sparked numerous grassroots campaigns and hashtags (including the case of Eric Garner ‘I can’t breathe’). See: “‘I can’t breathe’: Eric Garner put in chokehold by NYPD officer-video,” *Theguardian.com*, last modified December 4, 2014, last accessed April 28, 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2014/dec/04/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner-chokehold-death-video>>. “Human Rights Channel,” *Witness* (Blog), last accessed April 20, 2015. <<https://blog.witness.org/2012/12/2012-citizen-human-rights-video/>>

3.5 Virtual Ethnography

To help guide my study of online diaspora politics, I began the research process by undertaking what is generally referred to as “virtual”²⁵⁰ ethnography. I browsed through online spaces of the Internet and became an instrument of navigation and initial observation for the study.²⁵¹ I chose to begin with this methodology, as a way to explore the online through the eyes of everyday audiences and potential participants.²⁵² Virtual ethnographers move through cyberspace, observing, crawling the web (site by site) uncovering hyperlinks with the intention of descriptively analysing network connections and engagement patterns. Specific coding and mapping techniques may differ from one ethnographer to another, but the treatment of virtual phenomena as a ‘research field’²⁵³ remains relatively consistent.

According to Postill and Pink, “we can understand the Internet as a messy fieldwork environment that crosses online and offline worlds, and is connected and constituted through the ethnographer’s narrative.”²⁵⁴ Big Data research methodologies have been inspired by cultural anthropology, a logic that my research design also follows.²⁵⁵ As such, the digital methodology employed during the initial phases of the research process was interdisciplinary and open-ended in approach. Before beginning the digital mapping part of the research, I spent a substantial amount of time surfing diasporic websites (by searching Sikh, Tamil, Palestinian diaspora). This helped me to acquaint myself with common themes, activities, and discussions that made up the diaspora identity politics of each case study at the time of

²⁵⁰ “Online ethnography refers to a number of related online research methods that adapt to the study of the communities and cultures created through computer-mediated social interaction,” see: Gary M. Bowler Jr, “Netnography: A Method Specifically Designed to Study Cultures and Communities Online,” *The Qualitative Report* 15 (5) (2010): 1270. Otherwise referred to as online ethnography: Allison Cavanagh, “Behaviour in public? Ethics in online ethnography,” *Cybersociology Magazine* 6, August, 1999; cyber ethnography: Daniel Dominguez, Anne Beaulieu, Adolfo Estalella, Edgar Gómez, Bernt Schnettler, and Rosie Read, “Virtual ethnography,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 8 (3) (2007): 3-7; web ethnography: Satish K. Puri and Sundeep Sahay, “Role of ICTs in Participatory Development: An Indian Experience,” *Information Technology for Development* 13 (2) (2007): 133-160; network ethnography: Philip N. Howard, “Network Ethnography and the Hypermedia Organisation: New Media, New Organisations, New Methods,” *New Media & Society* 4 (4) (2002): 550-574.

²⁵¹ Hine 2005, 1.

²⁵² Ibid., 21.

²⁵³ There have been a few studies to date that have used virtual ethnography to evaluate online diaspora networks. See: Victoria Bernal, *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship* (Chicago; London: the University of Chicago Press, 2014). Helen Gerth, “Zoroastrians on the Internet, a quiet social movement: Ethnography of a virtual community,” *University of Nevada Las Vegas*, 2009. <<http://digitalcommons.library.unlv.edu/thesesdissertationthesiss/49>>

²⁵⁴ Postill and Pink 2012, 126.

²⁵⁵ Kozinets 1998, 366.

the study. This is commonly referred to as the “soak and poke”²⁵⁶ approach, which observes the lives or patterns of behaviour being studied. By observing online communicative interactions, I approached virtual ethnography as a way to understand culture.²⁵⁷ An ethnographic approach to cyberspace involves the observation and collection of cultural exchanges and flows between user-centred networks. The web presents a series of intertwined network linkages that require significant disentangling to be more clearly understood.

The benefit of using Big Data research methodologies is that the technique goes beyond basic browser search results to trace the depth and density of connections of web-based networks not visible on search engines. For example, when we search for something online, most people stick to the first few pages of results and rarely end up going through the entire catalogue of results. Rather than going through these rank based lists, Big Data helps to organise and show us these results as they relate to one another. Ranking is important to highlight website authorities and hubs, however technical methods help to map out relationships between websites as a ranked dataset. Again, the initial concern during the research design phase was to develop a methodology that ensured the dynamic nature of web-based networks was adequately captured. Patterns of connectivity, interaction and engagement are considered as a starting point to a more in depth analysis of online diaspora politics. The website rankings and observations I noted while exploring online, were not final in any stretch of imagination.

Although dynamic in nature, online exchanges, representations of diaspora politics or diasporic engagements characteristically have some sort of connection to the ground. The socio-cultural realities that surround an individual inform the way they approach the cyber domain.²⁵⁸ For example, blogging is a personalised and reflective online exercise of journaling wherein an individual or group can discuss anything they wish, with significant freedom. Blogs are diverse and can provide political commentary, advice on health and

²⁵⁶ This research procedure popularised by Fenno emphasises empirical observations over theory (most often rational choice theory) to explain political behaviours. See: Richard Fenno, “Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 80 (1) (1986): 3-15. Richard Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978).

²⁵⁷ Hine 2005, 8.

²⁵⁸ Maximilian C. Forte, *Centring the links: Understanding cybernetic patterns of co-production, circulation and consumption*, Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet, ed., Christine Hine (Oxford: Berg Publishers 2005), 94.

fitness and even focus on celebrity news or fashion based styling trends. In this thesis, I treat the web as a platform where people bring their offline realities, “with the hope of producing a new effect that can then be taken offline” to generate new ground realities.²⁵⁹ Individuals engage the online community with a purpose, whether it be to consume or construct ideas (blogging, sharing or replying to posts), or for online knowledge or content (Twitter self-selected newsfeeds, niche hobby websites).

Cyberspace offers distinct opportunities for individual users to decide what or with whom they wish to engage with. Beyond simply filling geographical holes, this thesis approaches the cyber domain as a transnational platform that is capable of connecting dispersed individuals by nurturing sentiments of community. According to Mills, because “communities are imagined”, the bonds that foster a sense of community online are flexibly “constructed in the minds of the members” and engaged participants.²⁶⁰

By conducting virtual ethnography, I was able to see that community-specific symbols, ethnic markers and religious markers played an important role in web-based ‘diasporic’ representations. While a more systematic web-based content analysis was conducted as part of the triangulated methodology, my initial observations showed that representations were different in each case study. For example, in the Sikh case, there was a significant referencing of Turbans and youth based activism in online search engine results. This differed from the Tamil case, for which browsing result largely focused on the post LTTE era and protest activities happening across the globe. Finally, in the Palestinian case, I observed that most online discussions centred on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an issue of world politics.

Collectively, these explorations made clear that discussing unresolved grievances in the ancestral homeland and sharing cultural activities or socio-political realities in countries of settlement help to bind dispersed groups together. Online users involved in diaspora politics have the ability to contribute to identity-based diasporic narratives by sharing ideas, interests and information that appeal (and offer a connective link) to scattered populations. Forte explains this as a process of co-production, which allows online users to revitalise and

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 104.

²⁶⁰ Kurt Mills, “Cybernations: Identity, Self-Determination, Democracy and the “Internet Effect” in the Emerging Information Order,” *Global Society* 16 (1) (2002): 70.

restore key concepts, themes and issues that may otherwise remain dormant or underrepresented.²⁶¹

The benefit of using ethnographic techniques is that the method is minimally intrusive, less time consuming and less costly than Big Data research methods; it also allows for regular contact with respondents.²⁶² But such an open-ended methodology also has its inherent problems such as research bias and subjectivity. Essentially, in conducting these virtual explorations, researchers go online with a purpose (searching key words, surfing key websites). To be clear, I approached virtual ethnography as a primer to more labour intensive digital mapping and rigorous web-based content analysis.

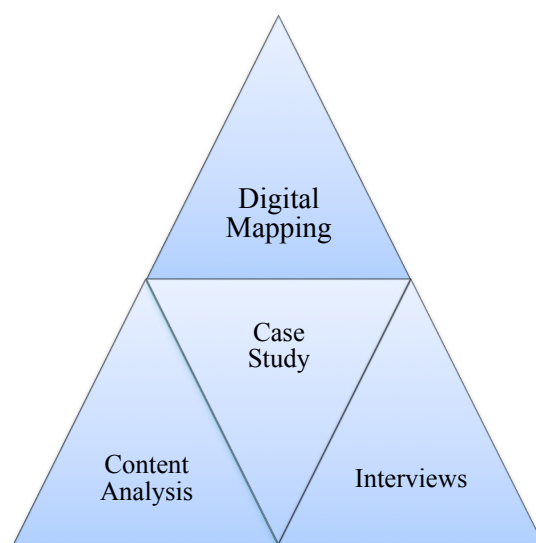
As a stand-alone methodology, the analysis of virtual ethnographies runs the risk of both over- and under-representing virtual phenomena, and this is reflected in decisions surrounding the coding classification of ethnographic observations (which will be discussed in the forthcoming mapping sections). Virtual ethnographies focusing on a handful of websites can over-emphasise or minimise the phenomenon being studied because the pre-selected sample can distort representational results. For example, if out of personal interest, my virtual explorations were focused primarily on themes of armed-resistance in each case study, the online findings of the study would likely be skewed. The sample websites would likely over-represent trends of online resistance or terrorist activities and under-represent the use of non-violence as a strategy and tactic of mobilisation in the digital age.

Despite these shortcomings, virtual ethnographies are very useful in providing a detailed understanding of network patterns and trends more broadly. The content observed online was treated as a starting point of inquiry for this thesis. The method offered a way to navigate online activity (identity and issue based) networks and numerous websites. The inferences of my online observations were further explored through Big Data mapping techniques, complemented with web-based content analysis and respondent interviews across each of the case studies. The triangulated research strategy is explained below.

²⁶¹ Forte 2005, 94.

²⁶² Robert V. Kozinets, "The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities," *Journal of Marketing Research* 39 (1) (2002): 63.

3.6 Research Design: Triangulation as a Method of Inquiry



A major contribution to this thesis is its use of multidisciplinary methodologies. Whether explicitly stated or not, in today's digital age, the majority of what is referred to as online research often includes offline components as well.²⁶³ Triangulated approaches that connect the online and offline remain sparse,²⁶⁴ and this is a gap that I seek to fill. I am specifically interested in the connection between shifting power dynamics enabled by web 2.0 online platforms and the impact these digital tools have on identity-based socio-political bonds.

Virtual ethnography is a starting point of inquiry, a backdrop against which observational inferences can be further explored. The triangulated approach of this thesis began online, with e-Diaspora atlas corpus results serving as point of reference, inference and analysis for each case study. Using statistical data obtained from the mapping, a web-based content analysis was then completed to highlight the key themes, political agendas, claims and issues articulated across each of the three cases more clearly.

The web-based methodologies outlined above were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with key informants. By reflecting and describing their online-offline

²⁶³ Shani Orgad, *From Online to Offline and Back: Moving from Online to Offline Relationships with Research Informants*, *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*, ed., Christine Hine (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), 52.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

experiences²⁶⁵, interviewees provided insight into how the web is used in political mobilisation processes and identity-based transnational engagements. Between interaction and empowerment, there is merit in questioning not only *why* actors feel the need to engage online, but also *how* diasporic narratives are presented on respective websites.

In conceptual terms, triangulated research methodology can be difficult to design, especially when considering the differing environments of interaction (online and offline) from which data is being collected. For example, the asynchronous nature of online interactions (like email-based interviews) differs from face-to-face interviews where it is easier to resolve discrepancies through real-time conversations with respondents.²⁶⁶ As virtual ethnography and Big Data digital mapping techniques rely upon classification and coding logic, interviews are considered to be the best way to gain greater insight into online representations. Even in today's digital information age, computer-mediated interaction continues to be met with scepticism, often being compared against the 'gold standard' of face-to-face communication.²⁶⁷ However, in-depth, face-to-face interviews are not without their own limitations in qualitative terms. Combining digital mapping and web-based content analysis with personal interviews provides a complementary means of contextualising both sides of the issue.

A mixed methodological approach contributes a more exhaustive conceptualisation of the enabling and supportive functions of the web in instances of diasporic contention. User-centred online platforms are not independent from the realities that surround connected users. Questions surrounding the veracity and reliability of research findings are addressed through complementary qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Below, I present the research methodologies employed for this thesis, which collectively aim to produce a comprehensive account of the patterns of online engagement and their associated impacts on contemporary diaspora politics.

²⁶⁵ Kozinets 2002, 5.

²⁶⁶ Orgad 2005, 57.

²⁶⁷ Hine 2005, 5.

3.7 Digital Mapping of Virtual Networks

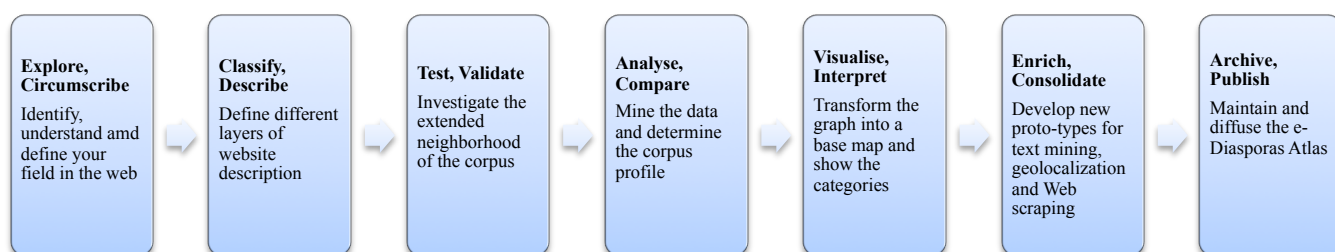
The research process begins by exploring the online networks of each case study. Digital maps serve as a primer for web-based content analysis and key respondent interviews. The intention is to gain a sense of virtual networks in the context of both intensity and inter-linked connections. The aim is to trace the scope and depth of identity-based diasporic narratives and the strategies employed to weave networks together. The web presence of each diaspora is analysed through visual representations of node (website) linkages. As such, this portion of the methodology focuses on uncovering the virtual network linkages that define the online diaspora politics in each case.

The digital mapping analysis was performed under the auspices of the e-Diasporas Atlas project.²⁶⁸ Maps showing the results obtained from Navicrawler (an online navigation tool) and Gephi (a mapping software) create cartographically visual ranked representations of virtual node networks.²⁶⁹ From these, clusters can be isolated, allowing for a spatial representation of websites based on frequency of hyperlinks. The virtual ethnography and subsequent digital maps produced through the e-Diasporas Atlas project offer a virtual snapshot of network linkages, and these visualisations provide a point of inference for the assessment and analysis of online diaspora politics in each case study. I used the results obtained from the e-Diasporas Atlas project to expose key areas of online activities and interests that make up the diaspora politics of each case study.

²⁶⁸ Under the ICT-Migrations Research Program, Foundation de la Maison des Science de l'Homme, Telecom ParisTech. See: e-Diasporas Atlas. < <http://ediasporas.ticmigrations.fr/chaine-methodologie/?lang=en> >

3.7.1 e-Diasporas Atlas: Corpus Building through Crawls, Coding, and Classification

Figure 3.1 e-Diasporas Atlas



3.7.2 e-Diaspora Corpus and Cartography

The e-Diasporas Atlas project aims to observe and analyse diaspora web presence through cartographic representation.²⁷⁰ The corpus cartographies represent a virtual snapshot of a moment in time.²⁷¹ To clarify this, the method I employed to capture online networks stems from a virtual ethnography I performed independently. This entailed surfing the web to gain insights into the key themes, discussions and community narratives represented online. Through virtual ethnography we can explore and discuss key characteristics of online engagement in each case. For example, searching terms such as ‘Palestinian’, ‘Tamil Eelam’, or ‘Sikhism’ will render a variety of results on the browser page. Search results are therefore considered a starting point of inquiry, and allow for a general understanding of the key points of emphasis in each case study. Cartographic representations of corpus networks emerge from a more technical process of exploration, using node selection to filter and circumscribe as explained below.

3.7.3 Building the Corpus

1) Web Exploration and Corpus Building: Using Navicrawler (a semi-automatic Firefox extension), relevant websites are identified and used to build a preliminary corpus list of 50 websites (nodes). By scanning the web, Navicrawler uncovers the hyperlinks associated with the website being visited (labelled as ‘next sites’). Each website is either included (labelled as ‘in site’) or rejected (‘out site’) as a link into the preliminary corpus.

²⁷⁰ Dana Diminescu, “e-Diasporas Atlas Exploration and Cartography of Diasporas in Digital Networks,” 3. <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/diminescudpaper.pdf>>

²⁷¹ Corpus maps archived on a weekly basis for future projects.

The initial phase of corpus building combines both search engine browsing and hyperlink crawling, which involves deciding which sites (and subsequent links) are to be included in the preliminary corpus so as to minimise a “black box effect.”²⁷² Automatic crawl techniques follow the initial stage of corpus building. In order to avoid bias or skewed results, it is vitally important to keep the thematic scope of inquiry in mind when selecting the website sample. Thematic boundaries serve to loosely manage the data, which is fairly open-ended in the ‘network of networks’ that make up the web. To create my corpus sample, I considered crosscutting identities, interests and activities that could in some way be deemed as diasporic. I did not essentialise sample websites based on their reference to ethnic, religious, nationalist sentiments, as this would be reductionist and more importantly would only serve to perpetuate the state-centric ‘container’ approaches that have capped the study of diasporic phenomena and their attached politics for decades. My primary focus was to objectively trace node websites based on their frequency and broad thematic focus. Key points included reference to political agendas or claims made in the name of the ancestral homeland, the diaspora, and countries of settlement. My method gained inspiration from Diminescu and Loveluck, who explain that in the online environment “linking carries meaning.”²⁷³ Following network logic, notions of power and influence are distributed across and between these relational interconnections.

Figure 3.2 Navicrawler Interface



²⁷² Diminescu, 3.

²⁷³ Dana Diminescu and Benjamin Loveluck, “Traces of Dispersion: Online Media and Diasporic Identities,” *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 5 (1) (2014): 3-4.

2) Data Enrichment: In this phase, the preliminary website list goes through an automatic crawl. The working corpus is then analysed through web scraping, which uncovers all network hyperlinks. Once the crawl is completed (usually an overnight process), a complete list of interlinked websites is obtained. At this stage, the density (network hyperlinks per node) of the corpus has been recorded. The website list is filtered to decide which to include in the corpus and which (if any) to reject. There are two main reasons for this filtering process. First, the automatic crawl provides detailed information on hyperlink patterns. At this stage of corpus building, we become aware of which sites are disproportionally linked into the corpus (in seed) versus those which mainly link out from it (out seed). Research projects may set numerical limitations (or base lines) on which sites to include in the corpus. Second, filtering ensures that beyond hyperlinking, all sites are checked for functionality. This provides an opportunity to remove dead sites, spam URLs, and sites outside the research scope. It should be noted that for the purposes of this thesis, no websites were removed based only on hyperlink trends. Following this initial process of filtering, the preliminary corpus goes through a second and larger automatic validation crawl. This is followed with a second filtration process, after which the cartographic representations of the corpus data are produced.

| <i>Palestinian Data Enrichment Filtering August 2011</i> | | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| url | SeedIn Degree | SeedOut Degree | Include |
| http://gimmetruth.wordpress.com/ | 1 | 20 | yes |
| http://lespolitiques.blogspot.com/ | 1 | 20 | no |
| http://usfopo.wordpress.com/ | 1 | 20 | yes |
| http://zioncon.blogspot.com/ | 1 | 20 | no |
| http://richardsilverstein.com/ | 45 | 19 | yes |
| http://lauraonthelleftcoast.blogspot.com/ | 4 | 19 | yes |
| http://thehollytree.blogspot.com/ | 4 | 19 | yes |
| http://ilovepalestine.com/ | 1 | 19 | yes |

3) Corpus Classification: At this point in the corpus building, a map of the entire website network has been produced. This includes all selected website nodes as well as the associated arc hyperlinks. The coding classification scheme dictates the visual representations the corpus will display. The methodology employed by the e-Diasporas atlas follows a rigorous software-based technique, but it allows researchers to code data based on individual projects. The maps produced serve as visual representations, points of inference aiding further inquiry. Classification schemes differ between researchers, but in contextualising space and place in relation to diaspora members common codes do exist. These most often include location²⁷⁴, language, type of activity and type of website. As the e-Diasporas atlas project is specifically interested in connected ‘migrants’, classification schemes largely focus on identity-based cultural and issue-based political themes.

The maps produced by the e-Diasporas Atlas project are considered a starting point of inquiry. Because my thesis undertakes a comparative case study approach, I selected classifications with data clarity and organisation in mind. In the initial introduction of virtual methodology, I emphasised capturing both sides of the screen—including the user. The classification scheme must therefore complement each of the respective cases to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the noted trends and patterns illustrated by the maps.

3.7.4 Corpus Classification Scheme

Type of Website: This thematic classification is categorised by the nature of the site, and points of emphasis are focused on highlighting the mode of interaction as well as understanding the platform basis through which information is presented. Exchanges can be interactive (two-way) or resemble classic news presentation styles (top-down). Beyond conventional splash sites, common categorisations include blogs, news groups and message board style forums.

Type of Actor: To consider the source of exchange, we must ask whether or not the user is an active agent. In order to deconstruct online narratives and surrounding debates further, it is essential to consider the ‘source of information’. Nodes do not operate on a 1:1 ratio between individuals, as this would mean that an individual maintaining a blog from home and an

²⁷⁴ <<http://coolwhois.com/>> is used to locate Domain IP registration details.

international organisation would both be represented by a single website node. Where information is available, it is of great benefit to uncover who is behind website maintenance activities, and what their specific role is. Individuals can be directly or indirectly involved in various organisations and groups mobilised around diasporic agendas and claims, or they can maintain a website for their own personal, creative and expressive purposes. Personal blogs by individuals may not carry concrete objectives, but often provoke reflective and intimate details of cultural affairs and identity-based narratives.

Through the assessment of online actors and hyperlink trends, it is possible to uncover the power relations that impact network narratives. Deliberate efforts to attract support for unresolved grievances can be made, for example, through the portrayal of current events by community media organisations. Thematic maps therefore offer an insight into representation, to explore web presence in the context of key diasporic activity agendas. Common actor categorisations include group, organisation, blogger and government.

Type of Activity (primary): Classifying the corpus by activity uncovers what is actually being discussed/presented online, highlighting the broad themes and narratives that occupy webspace. Diaspora dialogue is often informed by the socio-political realities experienced in countries of settlement and the ancestral homeland. This also includes the normative historical underpinnings—the community cornerstones associated with the diaspora in question. Actors enter online platforms of engagement with general thematic interests which are often embedded in their performativity. A thematic classification based on activity can help uncover the cleavages between collective identity and collective action (if any).²⁷⁵ A starting point for inferences, the activity corpus isolation questions the thematic boundaries of web-based diaspora politics. Commonalities, trends and patterns of online activity are not necessarily specific to the diaspora. Nodes may cluster and link based on larger societal norms that overlap particular diasporic claims and political agendas. This is common in online activities focusing on human rights and mobilised protest for example. Organisations such as Amnesty International and Oxfam are not diaspora-specific, but they are often able to contribute to contemporary grievance narratives and calls for justice through information

²⁷⁵ Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, eds., *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

sharing. Thematic representations of online activity are therefore beneficial, as they draw attention to key corpus activities and website clusters. This is especially useful when analysing prominent online framing strategies.²⁷⁶ Common activity categorisations include religion, community, culture, human rights, protest, boycott, peace, and commemoration.²⁷⁷

Language: By classifying language, we can begin to understand key attributes of the audience towards which online content is directed. Network inclusion and exclusion may be filtered based on linguistic ability. English often acts as the linguistic bridge for dispersed populations. Generational hurdles can also be managed through the standardisation of English online. This is particularly the case for younger populations, who may only have a conversational understanding of their ancestral native languages. Non-English based sites often include a variety of linguistic interfaces so as to remove linguistic barriers of interaction. Actors may also intentionally build linguistic walls, shrinking the space they occupy online. Such networks often maintain value-based linkages characteristically rooted in either religious affinities or geographically specific locations. With such a significant linguistic barrier, non-English sites may also invoke a far more personal, passionate and culturally rooted online experience. For the purposes of this thesis, analysis was largely focused on English language websites. Non-English websites were used to compare the language politics in each case study (See Chapter 7). Beyond communicative functionalities, we must acknowledge that language is “highly self-referential”.²⁷⁸ Cross comparisons with other corpus isolation maps therefore provide a better understanding of the influence of language between online clusters. Common languages include: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Tamil, Sinhalese, and Punjabi.

Country & Location: Admittedly the classification for website location is relatively loose. This is largely due to the complexity of online IP geographic identification. Blogs, for

²⁷⁶ Nilüfer Karacasulu and Elif Uzgören, “Explaining Social Constructivist Contributions to Security Studies,” *Perception* (2007): 35.

²⁷⁷ The corpus also includes a secondary activity isolation. It follows similar methodologies, and serves as a complementary cartographic visualisation for a more in depth analysis of online activity (external future research).

²⁷⁸ Darin Barney, *The Network Society* (Oxford: Polity, 2004), 17.

example, are self-defined and remain untraceable unless explicitly indicated in text. For methodological coherence, each corpus node was filtered through CoolWhois (www.coolwhois.com), a browser that traces IP domain address information. The domain registrations indicated were recorded, and blank domain addresses were also included (coded as none/NA). There is no 100% accurate technique currently available for publicly authenticating virtual domain address data. In response to censorship, many organisations opt to block their IP addresses. Alternatively, they may choose to purchase fake proxy IP addresses (largely based in the US). Patterns often emerge, particularly in the context of networks focused on political mobilisation. A comparative case study approach is therefore extremely beneficial in uncovering how different diasporic modes of engagement link transnationally. We can also theorise a network's 'centre of gravity', or the locus hub of diasporic affairs. Stateless diasporas in particular present an interesting puzzle, as they are not intrinsically linked to a sovereign territory. The roots of these diasporas are comparatively flexible, with dispersion often lacking a sole reference point (usually following secessionist attempts). In such cases, distance may not be regarded as an explicit hurdle. Online platforms may be regarded as the glue, a mechanism to pull participant members together. Even partial denial of geography (via proxies) will at least subliminally offer more validity to the activities occurring online. Under such conditions, online activities may encourage transnational sentiments nationhood (beyond state based lenses) between dispersed populations. A cross comparison between corpus maps allows for a more in-depth consideration the processes through which actors can disarticulate collective identity from physical territory. Common locations include the USA, UK, Canada.

3.7.5 Corpus Classification

Figure 3.3 Palestinian Classification

| url | type of website | type of actor | activity (primary cause) | secondary cause | language | country | location |
|---|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| http://bdsfrance.org/ | site | organisation | boycott | protest | French | France | Paris |
| http://twopeoplesonefuture.org/ | site | organisation | lobby | policy | English | USA | NA/NONE |
| http://israelpalestineanalysis.wordpress.com/ | blog | group | news | research | English | USA | California |
| http://ww4report.com/ | news group | organisation | news | research | English | USA | New York |
| http://protection-palestine.org/ | site | organisation | protest | community | French/ English | France | Paris |
| http://scottishpalestinianforum.org.uk/ | site | organisation | community | culture | English | UK | Scotland |
| http://palestinejournal.net/ | site | group | news | academic | English | Australia | Queensland |
| http://www.benwhite.org.uk | blog | individual | news | academic | English | UK | NA/NONE |

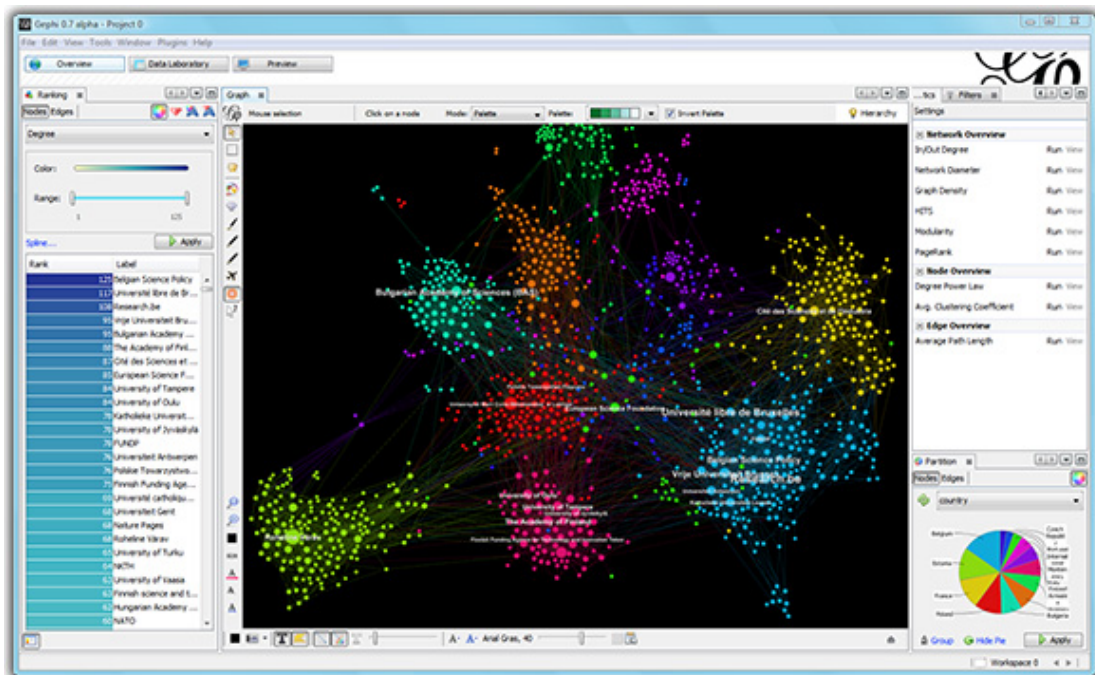
3) Network Visualisation: Manipulation and Graph Interpretation: The above classifications are imported into Gephi, a software application allowing for the spatialisation and manipulation of corpus networks. Gephi can be understood as a sort of ‘Photoshop’ for graphs.²⁷⁹ Corpus networks are explored through algorithms, in order to rank dynamic node-hyperlink data. The e-Diaspora technical team largely undertakes this filtration process. Through network analysis, clusters begin to form (as dictated by the thematic classifications recorded in stage two: the data enrichment phase). Stylistic components (size, gradient, colours) of the graph are also altered during this design phase.²⁸⁰ This includes streamlining node sizes relative to the network rankings recorded. As a visual representation, a great deal of logical emphasis is placed on ensuring usability, with special attention given to font and labelling.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Mathieu Bastian, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Jacomy, “Gephi: an Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks,” Paper from *International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM)* 8 (2009): 361.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 362.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Figure 3.4 Gephi Interface



4) Collaborative Sharing of (raw) Data and Findings: All findings and corpus visualisations are available on the e-Diasporas atlas website (www.e-diasporas.fr). This includes browseable corpus maps, thematic isolations, subdivided representations, raw statistical data and associated working papers. Beyond visual cartographic representations, the data collected is also available for public download as a scaleable vector graphics (svg) file. This format supports the two-way graphical interpretations necessary for virtual cartography. A tool for sharing information, the e-Diasporas atlas is an open-sourced dataset.

Corpus Node Searches

| | Palestinian | Sikh | Tamil |
|---|--|---|---|
| Browser Preliminary Search Prompts (Firefox Google) | Palestine, Palestinian diaspora, Gaza, West Bank | Sikh, Sikh diaspora, Sikhism, Khalistan | Tamil, Tamil diaspora, Sri Lanka, Tamil Eelam |
| <i>Submission of Preliminary Navicrawler Manual Corpus (50 nodes) - June 2011</i> | | | |
| <i>Full Validation Crawl Completed - July 2011</i> | | | |
| | Palestinian | Sikh | Tamil |
| Corpus | 493 nodes | 290 nodes | 243 nodes |
| Density (nodes to hyperlinks) | 5.6% | 3.1% | 4.4% |
| Edges (hyperlinks) | 13593 | 2616 | 2586 |
| <i>Corpus Classification completed between August 2011 - September 2011</i> | | | |
| <i>Publication of e-Diasporas Atlas website (www.e-diasporas.fr)</i> | | | |

3.8 Web-Based Content Analysis

The content analysis conducted in this thesis is based on the digital mapping results discussed in the previous section. Sample corpus websites (selected by mapping hyperlink results) were analysed, with the intention of uncovering how key activities, themes and issues are represented and framed online.²⁸² This includes exploring the language through

²⁸² Snow et al. (1986, 467), explain frames in the context of collective action, in which cases activists seek to gain public notoriety through increased following. What this often translates into is using commonly understood terms to gain a small number of followers (with intentions of snowballing). Frame bridging is “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (467). Again, frames are ever-evolving; the intention of content analysis in this context is to highlight how frames are presented to diaspora communities; and through interviews: how such frames are negotiated within physical communities. This can often result in frame transformation, “planting and nurturing of new values, jettisoning old ones, and re-framing erroneous beliefs and “misframings” (Snow and Benford 1988, 188).

which narratives of grievance, political agendas and claims of injustice are discussed and articulated. It is important to recognise that historical traumas can very well have impacts within the individual psyche and can also shape the shared collective identities and contemporary politics across countries of settlement and ancestral origin. With reference to past histories, the way grievances are framed online may indeed impact the shared perceptions between dispersed populations. It is with this in mind that web-based content analysis was treated as a conceptual backdrop for the interview section of the research process.

Neuendorf explains that content analysis is a useful strategy when attempting to examine the way messages and ideas are communicated—including the interaction between unit sources, messages, channels and receivers.²⁸³ Bauer and Gaskell note that as far as framing is concerned, content analysis often allows researchers to make inferences from a specific text.²⁸⁴ In the context of this thesis, one of the main strengths of content analysis lies in its ability to highlight the popular portrayals of unresolved grievances, as well as recollections on them. As discussed in the following sections, corpus nodes are used to pinpoint web-based units of analysis, which are then analysed to understand prominent online narratives for each case study more clearly.

“[B]reaking up ‘communication’ into bits” allows for a robust analysis of key online mobilisation frames.²⁸⁵ Researchers can examine website text to explain historical events, norms, values, and even the selective origins or causes of a conflict.²⁸⁶ Rather than focusing on a particular incident, much of strength of content analysis lies in its ability to scan the various ways in which historical events are contextualised between notions of shared identity and political interests.

Such textual analysis is often approached in a hybrid manner by linking qualitative and statistical methods.²⁸⁷ Bauer and Gaskell explain that in traditional content analysis, text can be classified either in terms of syntax (word choice, how often certain words are used and their order) or semantics (themes of text, common associations of words, inferences

²⁸³ Kimberly A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 52.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Neuendorf 2002, 71.

²⁸⁶ Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, eds., *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research* (London: Sage, 2000), 134.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

linked to attitudes, symbols or worldviews).²⁸⁸ This thesis strives not to fall into either camp – the qualitative or the quantitative. Basing analysis simply on the number of times a word is used downplays the importance and weight certain words have in world politics. Communicating traumatic memories using words such as ‘genocide’, ‘injustice’ or ‘rights’ is more powerful compared to words like ‘conflict’ because certain words are more likely to resonate more strongly with the greater international community through legal apparatus (most notably UN, R2P, ICC). My approach to content analysis combines syntax with semantics, and builds off Neuendorf’s “stylometrics”. As such I recognise that language is stylistic, and includes numerical and adjectival points of consideration.²⁸⁹

3.8.1 Differentiating between Classic and ‘digitised’ Web-Based Content Analysis

In its most basic form, content analysis (CA) focuses on text and symbols, allowing for the “systematic and quantitative description of communication.”²⁹⁰ The method produces “replicable and valid inferences from texts”, contextualising “meaningful matter” between communications.²⁹¹ The key difference between classic content analysis and digitised or web-based content analysis (web CA) is the underlying design logic of the methodology. Classic content analysis often follows a deductive research design, with the method of sampling guided by or contained within the narrow topicality of the research project. Depending on the aim of the project, the methodological structure follows either a conceptual (frequency of text, thematic conclusions) or relational (inferences between text and causality) mode of analysis. In a classical sense, content analysis traditionally involves a set of five key procedures:²⁹²

- Formulate a research question
- Select a sample
- Define categories for coding
- Train coders to code the content and check the reliability of coding
- Analyse and interpret the data collected during the coding process

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 134.

²⁸⁹ Neuendorf 2002, 197.

²⁹⁰ Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952), 18; Stanley J. Baran, *Introduction to Mass Communication*, 2nd edition (New York: McGrawHill, 2002), 10.

²⁹¹ Klaus Krippendorff, “Reliability in Content Analysis,” *Human Communication Research* 30 (3) (2004): 418.

²⁹² Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: an Introduction to its Methodology* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1980), 66.

Web CA differs in its approach, because the flexible user-centred nature of the web requires a slightly more open-ended research logic design. However, according to Herring, the methods employed in digitised (web-based) content analysis build from classic content analysis, and employ a similar process:²⁹³

- Develop a series of research questions, thesis, or scope of inquiry
- Select the computer-mediated data sample (in my case nodes from corpus data)
- Link key concepts to discourse features (messages, text, symbols)
- Apply method(s) of analysis to data sample
- Interpret results

Before discussing the sampling method and unit of analysis selected for web CA, it is important to acknowledge the user-centred properties of online modes of engagement. Content analysis technique is incredibly useful when assessing the dissemination and construction of aggregated networked narratives. The web holds a great deal of communicative power and can be used to influence the issues that users focus on or believe in. These aggregated agendas impact the processes through which calls to action²⁹⁴ are coordinated. Current affairs news, for example, can elicit sentiments of “responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequence, and morality.”²⁹⁵ As user-centred sources of information and ideas, websites can be used to construct and shape our understanding of current socio-political realities. Information exchange in today’s digital age has shifted from a purely top-down “author-centred” dissemination pattern to a more decentralised “user-centred” structure.²⁹⁶

According to Postill and Pink, content analysis is especially useful in deconstructing the dialogues that link web-based networks.²⁹⁷ Internet technologies invite more nuanced considerations of content, because differentiating between producers and consumers is especially challenging on the web 2.0 user-centred platform. Modes of online engagement

²⁹³ Susan C. Herring, “Content Analysis for New Media: Rethinking the Paradigm,” *New Research for New Media: Innovative Research Methodologies Symposiums and Readings* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication, 2004), 50.

²⁹⁴ Brian D. Loader, “Social Movements and New Media,” *Sociology Compass* 2 (6) (2008): 1930.

²⁹⁵ Holli A. Semetko and Patti M. Valkenburg, “Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News,” *Journal of Communication* 50 (2) (2000): 93.

²⁹⁶ Christopher Weare and Wan-Ying Lin, “Content Analysis of the World Wide Web Opportunities and Challenges,” *Social Science Computer Review* 18 (3) (2000): 275.

²⁹⁷ Postill and Pink 2012, 124.

are largely human-led, and content flows between offline and online spaces through connected users.²⁹⁸ In the context of diaspora studies, understandings of community often imply a particular sense of place. Actors claiming to represent stateless diasporas (lacking a centre of gravity in a geopolitical sense) may strive to recreate communities online, in order to reclaim a sense of place through ethno-religious grammar which conveys a particular shared meaning for dispersed populations.

Beyond web-based text, we must also consider that ‘splash screen’ graphics characteristic of web 2.0 platforms also convey meaning. Online interaction is increasingly visual, shifting attention from text to image-based representations, which more easily grab the attention of users.²⁹⁹ Indeed, much can be communicated through colours, images, audio-video files and hyperlink toolbars presented on website interfaces. Exhaustive web-based content analysis therefore requires additional contextualisation of the visual aspects that make the platform so interactive. The visual constructions and conceptualisation of node websites requires innovative and graphically descriptive methods of data interpretation and analysis.³⁰⁰

The non-static user-centred nature of the web underscores the importance of ‘actor-audience’ strategies in maintaining networked narratives. The lens of content inquiry therefore must consider the actor beyond the *what*, in order to question the *how*.³⁰¹ The strategies and tactics actors employ online rely on both stylistic text and splash screen imagery. Actors employ a variety of techniques to construct and reshape narratives. Frames rooted in “human interest” for example employ emotional tactics to link the individual with vivid recollections of traumatic events.³⁰² We note this in the circulation of viral images, and community specific trauma or terms that fuel outrage (suffering, victim, trauma, genocide). This differs considerably from frames rooted in normative morality, which Semetkot and Valkenburg argue are often based in religious and/or ethical values.³⁰³ Beyond stylistic concerns, websites can imply moral stances based on the use and placement of graphics.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 126.

²⁹⁹ Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 75.

³⁰⁰ Weare and Lin 2000, 284.

³⁰¹ Semetkot and Valkenburg 2000, 94.

³⁰² Ibid., 95–97.

³⁰³ Ibid.

Webpage colours, ethno-religious markers and campaign symbols for example are often encoded with shared values, which function as forms of group recognition and identity.

Websites can also visually suggest an aggressor, an ‘other’, an external entity which (between the lines of web-text) is implicitly held responsible for a conflict. Frames of responsibility characteristically engage in the rhetorical uses of ‘we’ to suggest an ‘us versus them’ understanding of a conflict.³⁰⁴ Outreach strategies can also invoke language that is more likely to diffuse and resonate with a wider audience by involving government bodies or human rights organisations. Although difficult to explicitly measure in a quantitative sense, the empirical results presented in this thesis will show that sentiments of collective responsibility are often intertwined in posts on current affairs websites or news updates. In these cases, external government bodies and international organisations (most notably the UN), often serve as the scaffold for claims of injustice, human rights violations and narratives of grievance.

3.8.2 Web-Based Content Analysis Methods

One of the key benefits of web-based content analysis is that it enables researchers to cut through Big Data and draw broad inferences from a selected sample of websites. However, it is very easy to get lost in the intricacy of aggregated online data.³⁰⁵ This is why I chose to use network algorithms in the form of corpus node hyperlinks to create the content analysis sample for each case study. According to Herring, hyperlinks are commonly used in methods of social network analysis because they denote interconnections.³⁰⁶ This means that instead of coding and counting individual links, we can understand “who (or what) is linking to whom (or what)” by looking at patterns of connection³⁰⁷

The web CA set out in this thesis builds upon social network analysis techniques in that it uses quantitative statistical data (hyperlink frequencies) to reduce the likelihood of research bias. Examples of potential sources of bias include individual interests in website activities, types of actors and location preferences. I view location bias as an especially important factor in the context of my research. Due to methodological limitations, much of

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Inhwa Kim and Jasna Kuljis, “Applying Content Analysis to Web based Content,” In *Proceedings of the 32nd International Conference on Information Technology Interfaces (ITI)* (2010): 283-288.

³⁰⁶ Herring 2004, 50.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 51.

the scholarship on diaspora politics follows a territorially-based research logic, giving preference to key areas of settlement or contention. This discounts the transnational scope of diasporic engagement and indirectly shapes the study of global diaspora politics to accord with (contained) triadic model approaches.

As the core of this thesis unravels around online modes of engagement, it would make sense to replicate this logic throughout the research methodology. Focusing on corpus nodes cuts through research biases and methodological limitations that have capped previous studies. Corpus node frequency was also the most efficient way to minimise methodological challenges associated with Big Data and new media. Here, I am specifically referring to the process of identifying samples and how to select web-based units of analysis.

1) Web CA—Sampling Method

Corpus node data from the e-Diasporas Atlas project was used to ensure an equal representation of inbound- and outbound-heavy websites. By including both directions of hyperlink flow, we can gain a more accurate account of the prominent agendas, ideas and issues connecting corpus nodes and the online actors directly or indirectly involved.³⁰⁸

Inbound-heavy website nodes assume an authority hub-like status online. These websites often function as a point of reference for small-scale actors (such as bloggers), and set the tone for discussion and dialogue within the network (what constitutes newsworthy affairs and media organisations). Focusing solely on inbound-heavy websites would not be representative of the dynamic nature of virtual network linkages. Outbound-heavy nodes (often bloggers) contribute considerably to virtual linkages by bridging and cross-referencing a diverse set of websites. At the same time, nodes can be *both* inbound-and outbound-heavy. These interconnections are not mutually exclusive as link flow patterns run asynchronously.

To cut through these aggregated network connections, corpus hyperlink frequencies provided a numerical rank of nodes for each sample selection. A total of 40 websites (the top 20 inbound and outbound) were selected from each individual dataset regardless of the total

³⁰⁸ “e-Diasporas Atlas.”

corpus size (Sikh n=290, Tamil n=243, Palestinian n=493).³⁰⁹ This was done to ensure methodological coherence between each of the three case studies. Working with more than 120 websites (40 x 3) would have proven too time-consuming considering that the web CA is but one part of the research's mixed-method design.

2) *Web CA—Units of Analysis*

After the nodes had been selected for the web CA sample, it was important to establish a website unit of analysis. Large online bandwidths and flexible storage capacity options mean that individual websites can differ in depth and scope. Some websites may be large and include many internal webpages, while others may follow a single (scroll up and down) page template. This can be problematic for researchers, as variability complicates using the individual website as a single unit of analysis.³¹⁰

To simplify and improve compatibility across the node sample, I chose to limit the unit of analysis to a one-click down approach. According to Herring, “[t]he homepage is the minimal unit that defines a website; it is the part that users are most likely to encounter, hence, arguably, the most salient and important part to analyse.”³¹¹ A one-click down approach accommodates different website interface designs and gathers information from the more frequently viewed pages of a website. “Given its attention-grabbing and organisational roles, a home page is likely to contain many central elements of Web design.”³¹² Content was also collected from secondary descriptive pages, if accessible through one-click (e.g. the ‘about us’, ‘mandate’, and ‘mission statement’ page of a website).

Secondary descriptive pages were selected as part of the unit of analysis to add context to the content collected from the homepage. These pages offer insights into the actors behind the websites because they provide an opportunity for actors to describe who they are, explain their key aims and agendas and promote their overall web presence. Secondary descriptive pages are important because they allow online actors to professionally converse and connect with audiences. The one-click method proved especially useful in ensuring

³⁰⁹ For methodological coherence, the dataset for the content analysis was limited to English language websites. See Appendix A: Content Analysis – Sample Websites and Appendix B: Content Analysis Results.

³¹⁰ Herring 2004, 51.

³¹¹ Ibid., 52.

³¹² Weare and Lin 2000, 281.

overall feasibility of the Web CA. The approach set a guideline³¹³ or content boundary around the asynchronous computer-mediated communication environment.

3) Web CA - Keywords

A total of 43 keywords were selected for each case study node sample.³¹⁴ Compared to other stages of the content analysis methodology, selecting the keywords for each web CA was most challenging. To use statistical data to justify a website sample, or draw a methodological line around units of analysis through a one-click approach is fairly straightforward. These codes of practice function through clear technologically enabled guidelines. Selecting the keywords to be recorded and analysed more directly depends upon the researcher and the concepts defining their research project.³¹⁵ Online variance can lead to methodological uncertainty; “[c]ompared to other domains of communications, an entire Web page remains a highly aggregated recording unit.”³¹⁶

The criteria for text and keyword selection in the web CA builds from the observations recorded during the exploratory virtual ethnography, which was conducted during the early phases of the research project. Keywords and phrases were selected based on these initial observations³¹⁷ and focused on the prevalent themes, issues and narratives articulated on sample websites. I also used secondary sources (literature, music, documentaries) to become better acquainted with each case study. Individual keywords were selected for each case study separately, and include identity and interest-based terms (Appendix B). The language used online can be used to imply boundaries, rituals or self-awareness,³¹⁸ which are all important concepts in contemporary notions of diaspora. I was aware that shared collective identity or communal sentiments could be expressed through ethnic, religious or nationalist reference terminology. At the same time, the open-ended nature and global reach of online platforms allows actors to reframe contentious homeland politics or re-allocate new forms of diaspora politics as international politics. Here, I am

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ See Appendix B: Content Analysis Results.

³¹⁵ Weare and Lin 2000, 297

³¹⁶ Ibid., 282.

³¹⁷ Howard 2002, 553.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 557.

specifically referring to rights-based discourse that is more likely to diffuse and resonate with a wider international audience.

To ensure validity and reliability, content analysis was conducted and recorded on the same computer device, through the same Internet connection and browser, ensuring a common frame of reference for screen displays throughout the process.³¹⁹ Commonalities across the cases did emerge, and as discussed in the case study chapters key themes were often linked to political grievances, cultural reproduction, international recognition and rights-based discourse.

To ensure content accuracy, two rounds of frequency validation were conducted. The first round of website text frequency calculations were complemented by a second round of frequency validation, in which the same text was lifted from the units of analysis and recounted. On this point, it is important to note that each sample website was print screened during the first round of content analysis in order to ‘freeze’ the sample.

3.8.3 Deconstructing the Domain Names

In addition to the web CA, the domain name addresses of each corpus dataset were used as individual sample frames for “identifiable messages.”³²⁰ Domain names are often strategically selected to imply a point of reference for all user audiences. Domain addresses indicate purpose, and can refer to a particular online or offline location or a thematic narrative (activities surrounding engagement). As a first point of interaction, there is merit in unpacking representative indicators embedded in virtual domain addresses. Weare and Lin explain that if we understand the web as an aggregated database, we can understand domain addresses as a means through which actors route traffic to their website.³²¹

Corpus domain addresses were deconstructed node-by-node (1026 in total), and categorised around themes of statehood, nationhood and advocacy for each case study. The results of this relational deconstruction can be found in the Venn diagrams in Chapter 7. Organisational themes of statehood, nationhood and advocacy were selected because they overlap with the identity and interest-based agendas that characterise diasporic modes of

³¹⁹ Weare and Lin 2000, 288.

³²⁰ Ibid., 281.

³²¹ Ibid., 277.

online engagement. They were also common themes in the virtual ethnography conducted at the beginning of the research.

Domain addresses can refer to physical or virtual locations, as a means to suggest a (re)occupation of territory. This type of instrumental connective action is predicted to be most relevant for dispersed populations characterised by contentious homeland politics, especially those that lack a centre of geopolitical gravity. Domain names may also refer to historical or communal backdrops, and use ethnic, religious or nationalist terms that function as symbolic markers online. Deconstructing domain names allows us to understand the ways in which statehood and nationhood is represented online, and whether or not these concepts overlap or link with past or present secessionist movements. The diagrams also create a complementary visualisation of online diasporic advocacy, which may or may not be rooted in the homeland but either way goes against the triadic model.

Corpus nodes provide the descriptive data necessary to scrutinise the anchors and boundaries of online diasporic dialogue. More concretely, domain addresses serve as topical indicators, highlighting the ways websites represent agenda frames related to networked narratives.

The case studies selected for this thesis differ substantially, not only in past migration patterns but also in current host-homeland politics. Contention is therefore equally privy to the narratives and timelines associated with community grievances. The descriptive analysis of domain names serves as a means to untangle contemporary diaspora politics, including questioning how narratives are labelled, how much space they occupy online and which community priorities are most commonly addressed. The visualisation of domain addresses provides insight into the agendas and claims being set out online. The results of the domain content analysis can then be used to summarise and illustrate the key differences between the three case studies, and are presented in the comparative analysis section in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

3.8.4 Limitations of Content Analysis

Common criticisms of content analysis focus mainly on research bias, especially when coding data. Questions of validity focus on the simplicity of textual analysis and the

subjective inferences made by researchers. Moreover, issues of representation are often raised, especially when considering that content analysis alone may not explain the influence text can have within the minds of audiences. Data collected in web-based content analysis does not carry ‘absolute’ meanings, as there is no way of fully corroborating an individual’s experience with a website.³²² This includes the total length of their site visit, the nature of the pages they visited, and what content they actually absorbed, agreed or disagreed with.

Such concerns are legitimate, and once again highlight the importance of using multiple methods to enhance the reliability and validity of Internet based research. Online narratives cannot be explored solely on a cause-effect spectrum. As previously mentioned, the development of web 2.0 has meant that cyberspace has given way to an enhanced negotiation of socially constructed ideas and information. As pointed out by Loader, online framing is in actuality a two-way interactive process.³²³ The intention of this research is to use content analysis to capture the dominant narratives that frame and link online modes of engagement in each case study.

3.9 Actor Interviews

Actors directly and indirectly link ideas and virtual representations to actual mobilisation processes. The triangulated research design of this thesis is most beneficial in highlighting both quantitative and qualitative features of online diaspora politics. Personal interviews, while informed by online interaction, take a step back from the screen, and are intended to engage in a more in-depth discussion, beyond the public relations and audience strategies the web characteristically invites from actors. Semi-structured interviews seek to observe “cyberpolitics” in terms of individual experience.³²⁴ As they invited reflection, the interviews were left fairly open-ended, allowing the respondent to guide points of consideration to a great extent. Employing an open interview design complements the inductive approach of the thesis. Emphasis was placed on a better understanding between identity and action as perceived by the respondent.

³²² Devi B. Prasad, *Content Analysis: A Method of Social Science Research CSS* (New Delhi: Rawat, 2008), 173-193.

³²³ Loader 2008, 19–25. Such interaction precludes identifying grievance negotiation between agents of change and community members. Frames are therefore not static, “[a]ctivists are thus both consumers of existing cultural materials and producers of new ones.” See also: Tarrow 2005, 61.

³²⁴ Choucri 2012, 27.

This entails capturing what Choucri calls “feedback dynamics”—the interactions between actors and surrounding social systems.³²⁵ By sharing their everyday experiences, common challenges and future ambitions, respondents contribute to a clearer understanding of the common agendas that shape online diaspora politics. As such, interviews provide a complementary lens to question how communication on such a public platform informs collective identity construction both online and offline.³²⁶

Interviews were framed by two main lines of enquiry, the first being the individual actor, and the second focusing on online activities. This entails examining respondents’ overall relationship and understanding of web-space. Of great importance was uncovering why they chose or felt compelled to engage in the first place, and for what purposes. We must be mindful that engagement can be time-consuming and risky.³²⁷ Whether framed by moral obligations, perceived injustices, or sentiments of ancestral kinship, engagement is not without roots.³²⁸ As such, the socio-political realities surrounding actors are of equal importance and must also be considered. This entails a more reflective approach on the part of the respondent, in order to reveal the embedded structures (if any) through which they engage.

Respondents are most useful in highlighting the trials and tribulations of user-centred platforms such as the web. Virtual space, a platform characterised by dynamic interaction, exhibits its own “modes of production.”³²⁹ Most notable are the “low-end do it yourself” approaches to the web 2.0 platforms.³³⁰ The ease of online interaction raises questions regarding the legitimacy, authority and reliability of disseminated content. Respondents therefore provide much insight into the interplay between the various diasporic actors. This is particularly useful in understanding the links between competition, camaraderie, host country socio-political realities, grievance narratives and mobilisation processes. The instrumental considerations of the web are therefore embedded in questions of authority and influence, and data from personal interviews is regarded as a primary qualitative source for deconstructing the framing strategies employed between online actors. Power—translated

³²⁵ Ibid., 5.

³²⁶ Alexander Halavais, “National Borders on the World Wide Web,” *New Media & Society* 2 (1) (2000): 10.

³²⁷ Francesca Polletta, *It was like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Nakamura 2008, 6.

³³⁰ Ibid.

into opportunity in this instance—is understood as the ability to coerce or influence audiences.

Often rooted in the hearts and minds of a seemingly imagined audience, the relationship between identity and action is especially complex online. Actors pushing for transformative change benefit from recognising such realities. In the case of audiences interested in ‘diasporic’ issues, identity appears to play an integral role in the construction of meaning and deconstruction of experience. Actors must be privy to this process of ongoing negotiation if they wish to expand their presence. We can look to respondents to gain a better understanding of the deliberative strategies associated with normative frameworks, strategic framing and collective expectations.³³¹ The boundaries of contemporary diaspora constructs are especially blurred when it comes to considering the emotional interplay between identity and action. According to Castells, “at the individual level, social movements are emotional movements.”³³²

For this reason, respondents were particularly questioned about their understanding of the interplay between diasporic boundaries and online networks. Understandings of boundary can assume a variety of physical and virtual connotations. In the case of diaspora, boundaries are largely rooted in questions of ‘community’ insiders and outsiders. Between experience and imagination, uncovering how individuals (actors and audiences) situate themselves is of great relevance for this research, and this is especially true when considering the conflicting relationship between notions of territory and diasporic identity.

In a quest for change and collective action, actors may experience difficulty reconciling their individual goals against the prominent agendas expressed online. Put differently, as networks expand, so do the boundaries of preferences, interests and values.³³³ The web as a user-centred platform adds further complexity, with hyperlink references serving as a bridge between varieties of networks which may not necessarily be identity-based.

Insight from respondents therefore proves most beneficial when trying to understand or ascertain the strategic opportunity costs associated with network broadening. Human

³³¹ Abdelel et al. 2009, 19–20.

³³² According to Castells (2012, 13) beyond political strategy “the big bang of a social movement starts with the transformation of emotion into action.”

³³³ Ibid.

rights-based frames and narratives of injustice may gain wider traction, but may also deflate the sense of ownership of online content. The mutable nature of the web can also transform content so that it may no longer be in line with the initial goals of the individual who disseminated it in the first place. Interactive engagement can for example push narratives away from identity-based diasporic activities and steer them towards a wider and more diverse transnational audience. This is often the case for grievances framed by human rights, injustice, and reconciliation. As the three diaspora case studies selected in my research are considered stateless, respondents were particularly probed for the interplay between identity based narratives and expanding virtual networks.

3.9.1 Respondent Sample

Interview respondents were selected based on corpus datasets. At the initial stages of outreach, emphasis was placed on securing interviews with actors based in London and Toronto. Both cities are commonly noted for their diverse populations and serve as global immigration hubs. Working through their personal networks, these initial actors suggested others who could also serve as potential sources of inquiry. The sample of respondents was largely solidified by the snowballing technique. Reflective cross-referencing based on actor reputation and activity helped in terms of sample outreach. This also included consideration of actors mentioned in passing as adversaries, so as to ensure a representative sample. Respondents were also obtained outside of the two primary outreach locations. This came about largely as a result of network snowballing, as not all corpus actors were able or willing to participate.

The interviews were conducted through a variety of media. As well as face-to-face interaction, to accommodate distance, interviews were also conducted via Skype, telephone, and email chat interfaces. Such an online approach to interviews further underlines the instrumental utility of virtual platforms in facilitating interaction. It should be noted that many actors preferred and suggested alternatives over face-to-face interviews due to efficiency. Online and offline spaces complement one another, and corpus actors by the nature of their engagements are well placed for both. Given the contentious nature of some of themes discussed (whether rooted in grievances, community, or religion) emphasis was

placed on maintaining conditions that made the respondent feel as comfortable as possible. Interviews fell in line with the overall inductive approach of the thesis.³³⁴

3.10 Ethical Considerations and the Reflexive Researcher

The data collected for my research were obtained through non-web (offline) and web-based (online) approaches. Because the research process began online, I will first address key ethical issues that arise in Internet-based research (commonly referred to as IBR). This is followed with the common ethical protocol understood as ‘good practice’ when conducting semi-structured interviews. Finally, to maintain transparency, I reflect on my position as the author of this thesis and discuss my own subjectivities in relation to the overall research process.

3.10.1 Internet-based Research (IBR): Ethical Tensions Raised by Digital Methods

Internet technologies are constantly evolving in the user-centred web 2.0 era, and present significant ethical challenges for researchers conducting online research. Ethical issues commonly focus on the ubiquitous and very public nature of online environments and the codes of practice that guide digital methods.³³⁵ I consider the relationship between human subjects and their online personas and the public/private paradox of online content to be key ethical grey areas of IBR. To address these grey areas, I refer to the ethical guidelines put forth by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).³³⁶ According to the AoIR, the complexity of the Internet lies in its multiple understandings: as a social phenomenon, a tool, and a field of research.³³⁷ The reports (v1 2002, v2 2012)³³⁸ produced by the Ethics Working Committee of the AoIR offer assistance in pinpointing and overcoming ethical challenges associated with web-based Internet research. Key ethical tensions outlined in the 2012 report serve as a rough guideline for the online component of my research project:

³³⁴ See Appendix C: Interviewees and Interview Outreach (Letter Sample).

³³⁵ Jason Hughes and John Goodwin, eds., *SAGE Internet Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2012).

³³⁶ The AoIR is a cross-disciplinary academic association committed to advancing the field of Internet studies. See: <<http://aoir.org/>> Annette Markham and Elizabeth Buchanan, “Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Version 2.0. Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee,” (2012): 3. Retrieval from < www.aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>

³³⁷ David Wilkinson and Mike Thelwall, “Researching Personal Information on the Public Web Methods and Ethics,” *Social Science Computer Review* 29 (4) (2011): 389. Retrieval from < www.aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>

³³⁸ Ibid.

Human subjects. According to the AoIR the definitional boundaries of the ‘human subject’ vary from field to field and aside from medical/healthcare-based studies, do not always fit with the online IBR environment.³³⁹ For studies based in the social sciences, it is more appropriate to concentrate on concepts such as harm (not causing it), vulnerability, and personal details (identifiable information of respondents).³⁴⁰ In conducting my research, I did not assume, attribute or treat online content as a direct reflection of any individual in particular, a point which is discussed in greater detail below. I recognise that the perspectives of individuals who do not publish online (whether out of choice, lack of online literacy or connective opportunity) were most likely left out of the IBR sample frame.³⁴¹

Mindful of technological determinism, I wish to clarify that my research is primarily directed towards understanding the online environment because as a budding political arena, cyberspace remains under-theorised and under-researched. For this reason, ethical concerns during the data mining process (scraping hyperlinks, website content) focused on collecting information in the least biased, disruptive and harmful way possible.

To address ethical dilemmas associated with human subjects, I first considered whether the digital methods employed in the research followed a “non-intrusive web-based research” design or an “engaged web-based research” design.³⁴² By making this distinction, Kitchin posits that researchers can determine potential impacts on human subjects and pre-emptively ensure their protection during the research process.³⁴³ The mapping technique used in this thesis is considered non-intrusive because the method of data mining and information collection does not interrupt or interfere with human subjects or the natural state of affairs online.³⁴⁴ I did not alter or add content or text to any webpage while conducting my research. As opposed to directly engaging with human subjects, the mapping part of my research entailed an in depth exploration, tracing and archiving of nodes (websites) and interrelated hyperlinks as structured on the web.

³³⁹ Ibid, 6.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 389.

³⁴² Heather A. Kitchin, *Research Ethics and the Internet: Negotiating Canada's Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 15.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

Private/Public. Deciphering ‘public’ and ‘private’ content remains one of the most ambiguous and ethically challenging aspects of IBR. At the most basic level, it is important to recognise that the activity traces people leave online can maintain a life of their own. The AoIR point out that while individual users may strive to maintain a sense of privacy over their content, web data aggregators and search engine tools make published content easily accessible to a wider public.³⁴⁵ Once content is published online, it can be referenced, replied to or linked, and can reach an audience far wider than initially intended or imagined. The ethical line between public and private content in the online environment is an especially complex distinction because users sometimes use the Internet (technically a public domain) to air aspects of their otherwise private lives.³⁴⁶

In their review of IBR ethics, Convery and Cox acknowledge the lack of consensus over what defines ‘public’ and suggest that researchers use offline informed consent when dealing with online content that assumes a more private tone.³⁴⁷ They cite the 2002 AoIR guidelines, which stipulate that if online participants appear to believe their communication is private, the researcher has an obligation to protect their confidentiality and anonymity.³⁴⁸ As much of the research presented in my thesis builds off hyperlink data, I complemented the above recommendations with special consideration of what constitutes public content in the online environment. The data collection method began by tracing and mapping out the relationships between hyperlinked websites, rather than human subjects or individual participants *per se*. To remain as objective as possible, each crawl began with general Firefox search prompts (Sikh diaspora, Tamil diaspora, Palestinian diaspora). While I did not engage with online participants in real-time communication via chat rooms or on forums, I was aware that sample websites could include remnants of an individual’s identity and their online persona, especially in the case of blogs.

According to Wilkinson and Thelwall, the ethical tension between public and private content is more a question of what information is accessible on the public web for the

³⁴⁵ Markham and Buchanan 2012, 6.

³⁴⁶ Sarah Michele Ford, “Reconceptualizing the Public/Private Distinction in the Age of Information Technology,” *Information, Communication & Society* 14 (4) (2011): 557. See also: Helene Snee, “Making Ethical Decisions in an Online Context: Reflections on Using Blogs to Explore Narratives of Experience,” *Methodological Innovations Online* 8 (2) (2013): 52-67.

³⁴⁷ Ian Convery and Diane Cox, “A Review of Research Ethics in Internet-Based Research,” *Practitioner Research in Higher Education* 6 (1) (2012): 51

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

average user.³⁴⁹ They argue that regardless of content (whether blogs, forums, informal text or comments), if a webpage lacks password protection it is part of the “public web.”³⁵⁰ While conducting my research I noted that of the 1026 websites traced, coded and mapped in the corpora, not one was password protected, and as such each website and the information of it was part of the public domain. Interestingly, there were many websites in the sample that had proxy addresses or hidden IP addresses, which are commonly used to hide 'virtual' footprints. Although the sampled websites lacked barriers of entry, it is still important to distinguish between content published on a website and information retrieved via the web (such as email content).³⁵¹ Personal exchanges such as email correspondence add another ethical layer of consideration, in which consent and privacy become far more significant. This is addressed in greater detail in the section on semi-structured interviews.

Wilkinson and Thelwall point out that when dealing with content published on webpages, consent is better understood in terms of copyright.³⁵² Following this recommendation, irrespective of the impact this could have had in the data collection process, I was prepared to comply with any website requests for permissions and copyright notices. To be clear, none of the sampled websites made any such request or copyright demand, which minimised ethical issues associated with privacy and infringement restrictions.

People and Data (text). The relationship between online content/text and what the AoIR call ‘personhood’ is very fuzzy in IBR. Prior to starting my research, I sought to gain clarity on the ethical boundaries and limits of content carrying individual personal details (avatars, screen names, bloggers). According to Boyd and Crawford, the biggest challenge of Big Data lies in its aggregate structure; content can be measured and quantified, which can potentially lead to distorted data samples if researchers do not use caution.³⁵³ Using Twitter as an

³⁴⁹ Wilkinson and Thelwall 2011, 388.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 394.

³⁵² Ibid., 395.

³⁵³ Danah Boyd and Kate Crawford, “Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a Cultural, Technological, and Scholarly Phenomenon,” *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (5) (2012): 672.

example, Boyd and Crawford remind researchers that not every user or online persona translates to a real live person.³⁵⁴

I viewed it as unethical to blindly correlate sample data to a particular individual and did not treat digitised information as an extension of personhood. A website can just as easily be managed by an organisation, a government institution, an individual blogger or a group of forum moderators. It would be far too generalised and technologically deterministic to assume online-offline environments function at a 1:1 ratio. Wilkinson and Thelwall posit that from a humanities perspective, Internet based content and text can also be approached as a form of “cultural production.”³⁵⁵ Individuals are the authors of blogs and the creators of websites. As in any creative endeavour, the opinions expressed on blogs and websites may not coincide with the personal opinions of the authors in much the same way as the opinions of a fictional character may not coincide with the creator of that character. In the online environment, it is important to separate individuals from the document being studied as a research object.³⁵⁶

The digital methods employed in this thesis were designed to concentrate on networked relationships between nodes (websites) and the nature of published content. The information obtained through the data mining process is freely accessible in the public domain and did not include any personal data that could incriminate or damage individuals.³⁵⁷ These personal details would have added an additional layer of ‘human subject’ ethical dilemmas to the online portion of the research project, and as well as being irrelevant to the research, are best avoided.

3.10.2 Semi-Structured Interviews with Human Subjects

As a primary “object of research”, corpus websites served as a point of contact for potential interviewees, who remained “indistinct” until correspondence commenced.³⁵⁸ Kvale suggests that researchers use themselves as a “research instrument” throughout the interview phase of

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Wilkinson and Thelwall, 2011, 395.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 394.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 396.

³⁵⁸ Markham and Buchanan 2012, 7.

a project.³⁵⁹ It was important to remain ethically accountable³⁶⁰ to the overall research project while contacting website moderators. I use the term ‘moderators’ here because until more personalised communication ensued, there was no way of confirming who I had contacted, their role in managing website activities (if any), and whether they or any of their colleagues would agree to an interview. In the following section, I discuss the key ethical considerations that arose while requesting, coordinating and conducting interviews.

Interview Outreach. The interview phase of the research marked a shift to more human subject based ethical considerations. Ethical issues raised in this area of research commonly focus on respecting the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of potential respondents. I was aware that the data obtained through semi-structured interviews would directly involve specific individuals. Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the human subjects being interviewed was therefore of the utmost importance.

To begin interview outreach, I created a template letter describing the nature of my research and the online mapping I had undertaken. I provided links to the e-Diasporas Atlas project. In requesting interviews from potential respondents, researchers are advised to explain why the person (in my case the moderator) has been selected, and what their participation would contribute to the overall research project.³⁶¹ In the letter I explained that I was interested in providing an accurate and representative picture of online diasporic activities and new forms of identity politics. Insights from voices behind the screen would help to add context to the empirical online data. Respondents were invited to openly reflect, share and discuss how the web fitted into their daily affairs (work and personal). Multiple platforms were used to contact potential respondents (‘contact us’ webpages, email, Facebook Messenger, Twitter direct messages). I concluded the letter by thanking the recipients for their time and consideration and also provided my contact details for any questions, comments or concerns.³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Steinar Kvale, *InterViews: An introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (USA: Sage Publications, 1996), 125.

³⁶⁰ Even when data is seemingly public, it is important to act ethically both to the field of research and to the research subjects (a broader concept than privacy), see: Boyd and Crawford 2012, 672.

³⁶¹ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (USA: Sage Publications, University of Michigan, 2005), 94.

³⁶² See Appendix C: Interview Outreach (Letter Sample).

Conducting the Interview. Researchers must reconcile their desire to gain knowledge from an interviewee with the emotional aspects of human based interaction.³⁶³ Building trust and maintaining rapport with sample respondents was a key concern throughout the interview phase of the research project. I approached interviews as a “construction site for knowledge”³⁶⁴ in which each respondent’s ease and comfort took priority. Interviews were coordinated at the discretion of the respondent and took place in person as well as by email, telephone and Skype. While face-to-face interviews were preferred, my primary obligation was to the respondent who had voluntarily chosen to participate in my study. Interviews conducted through the Internet (skype/email) proved especially useful in accommodating busy schedules and geographical distances.

Each respondent was briefed with a general overview of the research project prior to commencing the interview.³⁶⁵ All interviews were conducted after obtaining informed consent (verbal or written), and were recorded³⁶⁶ (for transcription) only after gaining permission from the respondent. I explained that rather than taking the form of a strict question and answer process, the interview questions would follow a more open-ended “conversational partners”³⁶⁷ structure. Interview questions served as a starting off point for more in-depth two-way discussion, and the discussion was guided by the respondent’s reflections. I made an effort to listen attentively and maintained a non-directive non-judgmental tone while conducting the interviews.

It was equally important to remind respondents that if they felt uncomfortable with the line of questioning or the overall interview, they could opt out immediately with no questions asked.³⁶⁸ At the end of each interview, I asked the respondent if they had any further questions or comments they wished to add and thanked them for their time. This was followed with a courtesy message in which I provided my contact details for future reference.

³⁶³ Kvale 1996, 125.

³⁶⁴ Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (Great Britain: Sage Publications, 2007), 7.

³⁶⁵ Kvale 1996, 113.

³⁶⁶ In addition to asking permission to record, it is also the responsibility of the researcher to follow any requests to turn the recorder off. See: Rubin and Rubin 2005, 98.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁶⁸ Kvale 2007, 27.

Confidentiality and Consequences. Under the ethical principle of beneficence³⁶⁹, I conducted the interviews in the least intrusive way possible. Wilkinson and Thelwall suggest that researchers protect the identity of interviewees to minimise the chances of causing harm.³⁷⁰ I followed this recommendation and continue to safeguard the personal details of everyone I contacted during the research phase of this thesis. I also bore in mind that withholding the private details of respondents does not render their identities entirely undetectable.³⁷¹ All recordings were audio (not visual), and all were protected on a separate computer drive to ensure data storage protection. Each respondent was made aware of this.

Ethical dilemmas associated with confidentiality are particularly complex in studies with an online focus. Respondents may maintain visible profiles through their associated links with online personas, blog avatars, public outreach campaigns, and on-the-ground engagements. Independent of their participation in my research project, these day-to-day activities can be considered as part of the public domain, and individuals who work in the same area or who share similar interests may be able to recognise each other through the information presented in this thesis.³⁷² I respected the confidentiality and anonymity of each respondent, although I was aware that nothing prevented them from discussing the interview with their peers. Ultimately, my primary obligation was to ensure that interviews remained a positive experience for the respondent and that sensitive topics were discussed with empathy.³⁷³

3.11 Reflexivity: Understanding my Position as a Researcher

In this section, I reflect on my position as the author of this research and subsequent thesis. Davies explains reflexivity as “a process of self-reference” in which researchers connect their own subjectivities to the overall research process.³⁷⁴ This entails critically assessing how the data collected may have been affected by the researcher’s focus, social context and worldview.³⁷⁵ A reflexive approach to qualitative research is particularly useful in

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

³⁷⁰ Wilkinson and Thelwall 2011, 387.

³⁷¹ Kvale 1996, 114.

³⁷² Rubin and Rubin 2005, 98.

³⁷³ Kvale 1996, 116.

³⁷⁴ Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Anthropology: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 7.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

establishing greater transparency. I recognise that research is “co-constituted”, and represents “a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationships.”³⁷⁶ The following discussion offers a reflexive account of my own subjectivities and considers how my position as a researcher informed the data collection and data analysis portions of this study.

My Involvement in the e-Diasporas Atlas Project

Most of the respondents were interested in knowing more about the e-Diasporas Atlas project and the research findings that led me to contact them. Some respondents requested I go through the maps and explain the network dynamics of the corpus (key activities, actors, locations). I was aware that respondents might react differently to the breadth of data I had collected online and did not go into too many technicalities unless asked. I did this to avoid overwhelming the respondent, or making them feel as though they did not have much to contribute to a research project so heavily based in digital methodology. At the same time, I remained aware that explaining the online data to respondents could potentially influence the points discussed during the interview.

On this point, it is important for researchers to recognise that interactions between respondents and interviewers are rarely equal. Data collected from interviews are not without their own unequal power hierarchies.³⁷⁷ For example, I was aware that by initiating outreach, discussing my research project and asking open-ended questions, I maintained a disproportionate level of control over the interview-setting environment. Minimising asymmetrical power relations between respondents and myself (as the researcher) was a primary concern throughout the data collection process. I explained to respondents that regardless of the online data and the conclusions reached from it, their insights were extremely important to the overall accuracy and legitimacy of the research project.

To avoid being technologically deterministic, I approached sample respondents as independent human subjects with their own sense of personhood. I clarified that I was interested in hearing about each respondent’s daily realities, key activities and administrative

³⁷⁶Linda Finlay, “Negotiating the Swamp: the Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice,” *Qualitative Research* 2(2) (2002): 212.

³⁷⁷Steinar Kvale, “Dominance through Interviews and Dialogues,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (3) (2006): 484.

frustrations. I was searching for factors that digital methods could not adequately capture or account for. Allowing the respondent to guide much of the interview discussion helped build a rapport and add context to the online mapping data. Semi-structured interviews were particularly useful in easing unequal power dynamics because the open-ended nature of the interview gave respondents a sense of authority over their voice.³⁷⁸

Many of the respondents did not regard their online engagements as anything extraordinary, and considered web engagements a normal part of communication in modern times. I found it most fascinating that the majority of respondents were reluctant to define themselves as political entrepreneurs. Even those deeply connected to the web who maintained a personalised online presence (such as bloggers) explained that they were merely doing their part for a larger cause or a specific political project.

Reflecting on my Position as a South Asian Female

During the interviews, the most frequently asked questions from respondents were why I had chosen this project, and what my ethnic background was. That my South Asian heritage could be a source of further discussion was something I did consider prior to contacting potential interviewees. I never initiated conversations regarding my ethnicity, but when asked I did not shy away from answering these questions. The ultimate goal was to gain trust and build rapport with respondents who had voluntarily agreed to participate in my study.

To many respondents (more especially in the Sikh and Tamil sections), my name is very clearly identifiable as Hindu Punjabi. At the initial stages, when contacting people by email, I was aware that this might trigger certain preconceptions, but at the interview stages (particularly face to face interviews and Skype video interviews) I was willing to discuss this if asked to by the respondent. I felt most tense when discussing the Khalistani secessionist movement and the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple. On this point, I noticed a clear difference between the way younger and older (40+) respondents negotiated my ethnic background during the interview process.

³⁷⁸ Semi-structured interviews were particularly useful in easing unequal power dynamics because the open-ended nature gave respondents ample opportunity to discuss issues at their discretion.

Younger Sikh respondents more openly discussed contentious topics such as the Khalistani movement, Sikh statehood and grievances associated with 1984. Younger respondents based in Canada were also far more comfortable defining me as a Hindu Punjabi, a subject which elder respondents avoided entirely. Some explained that if they felt they could not trust me, they would not have discussed Air India Flight 182, Canada's worst act of aviation terror and a sensitive topic for the greater Sikh community.

Compared to their elders, younger respondents often expressed a more intimate level of frankness and candour with me. This was common in each of the case studies. Rubin and Rubin assert that trust between respondents and interviewers increases when both parties share a common background.³⁷⁹ I hypothesise that younger respondents may have internally pegged me as a second-generation immigrant, someone they felt comfortable with, who could relate to being a young adult with foreign-born parents. Again, I did not go into details of my family's migration history, but even something as minor as my Canadian accent may have implied a second-generation status.

My Position as a Millennial (born between 1982 and 2000)

I recognised fairly quickly that my ethnic background and experiences with the e-Diasporas Atlas project would influence the modes of data collection and interpretive analysis put forth in my thesis. It was only after completing the first year of my doctoral studies that I began to fully grasp the degree to which my position as a 'millennial' (born after 1982) shaped the focus and methodology of my research.

It is now widely accepted that millennials characteristically use digital technologies to mediate social interactions, friendship networks and civic engagements with greater ease and comfort than their elders.³⁸⁰ Digital technologies are "primary mediators" of human communication for a large portion of individuals born after 1980.³⁸¹ I initially underestimated how my position as a 'digital native' may have influenced my approach to Internet web 2.0 technologies. Prensky defines digital natives as "native speakers" of the digital language of

³⁷⁹ Rubin and Rubin 2005, 92.

³⁸⁰ John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 2.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

the Internet, email platforms, and computer games.³⁸² Digital technologies are ubiquitous for millennials because most have engaged with them since childhood.

“They [digital natives] have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video games, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age.”³⁸³

Digital technologies are an integral part of life for digital natives such as myself. It was only through an exhaustive survey of new media communication technology literatures and discussions with senior academics (‘digital immigrants’ born prior to 1980) that I recognised my own subjectivities towards the Internet and its relevance in contemporary society. It is important to acknowledge that individuals born prior to 1980 often approach digital technology differently because they can more clearly recall a time without it. They have had to learn and acquire technological skills at a later point in life, after childhood. Prensky explains that like geographical immigrants, some ‘digital immigrants’ adapt to their surroundings better than others.³⁸⁴ He claims that ‘digital immigrants’ retain bits of their “accent” no matter how tech savvy they become.³⁸⁵ This accent can be understood as an attitudinal hesitance or unintentional scepticism towards Internet web 2.0 technologies.

“The “digital immigrant accent” can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it.”³⁸⁶

The ‘digital native’ concept was very useful in pinpointing and unpacking my own subjectivities with regards to the Internet. I recognise that on a personal level, I approach digital technologies with great enthusiasm and research intrigue. That being said, I do take

³⁸² Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” *On the Horizon* 9 (5) (2001): 1.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 2.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

issue with the native/immigrant comparative metaphor. To categorise individuals based on their year of birth and to equate behaviours and worldviews accordingly is reductionist and highly problematic. The distinction between a digital native and a digital immigrant is not as clear-cut as the metaphor would have us believe. Individuals born before 1980 could very well have a greater level of knowledge, expertise and interest in digital technologies compared to younger populations. Conversely, it would be a gross exaggeration to assume that all millennials are tech savvy or take an active interest in new digital technologies.

Reflecting on the native/immigrant comparative metaphor reaffirmed my commitment to balanced and non-deterministic online research. I constantly reminded myself during the interview process that online space was not a natural resource nor an obvious platform of engagement for all individuals. To my benefit, I am old enough to remember a time before web 2.0 platforms, Wi-Fi, and smartphones—increasingly omnipresent technologies. From the days of dial up Internet to the present, I have witnessed the growth and expansion of the Internet first-hand. I recognise that while younger populations may on average maintain a more interactive relationship with digital technologies, digital divides in terms of access still exist.

The Digital Divide: Beyond the Binary

Understandings of the term ‘digital divide’ have evolved much like the relationship between people and increasingly multidimensional digital technologies. Definitions of the digital divide traditionally focus on notions of physical access such as owning a computer and having access to a network connection.³⁸⁷ The digital divide is traditionally regarded as a binary concept in which physical access to the Internet separates the technological ‘haves’ from the ‘have-nots’.

A binary approach is increasingly limited, however, as it fails to consider how issues of language, education and literacy, as well as socio-cultural and community-based resources impact access in practical terms.³⁸⁸ Technological advancements over the last decade require

³⁸⁷ Jan van Dijk and Kenneth Hacker, “The Digital Divide as a Complex and Dynamic Phenomenon,” *The Information Society* 19 (4) (2003): 315.

³⁸⁸ Mark Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide* (Cambridge Mass; London England: MIT Press, 2004), 6.

scholars to adopt more nuanced multidimensional approaches to the digital divide. There is a need to recognise the growing ubiquity and embeddedness of Internet connectivity in our daily lives. Warschauer points out that when we talk about the digital divide today, we are actually referring to differing degrees of Internet and communication technology access.³⁸⁹

According to Van Dijk and Hacker, the size of the digital divide depends on the type of access being denied.³⁹⁰ They approach the concept of access in terms of barriers of inclusion. These barriers are categorised through four kinds of access: “mental access” (lack of interest or computer anxiety), “material access” (lack of computer/network hardware), “skills access” (inadequate education or insufficient social support), and “usage access” (lack of usage opportunity).³⁹¹ The concept of access is therefore multi-layered and extends beyond the physical or binary to include levels of technical skill and usage.³⁹²

In the context of my research project, I found this access-based typology particularly useful in peeling away the traditional binary (have/have-not) layers of the digital divide. Binding the issue of inclusion to physical connectivity oversimplifies the role of the individual in producing and consuming ‘user-centred’ Internet content. I take issue with the binary view of the digital divide because it inherently assumes that all individuals with network access approach online platforms similarly. Levels of skill and usage can differ significantly between individuals. Physical access to a computer and network connection provides only a surface level account of online engagement and interaction patterns.

Most of the research conducted for this thesis was based in Europe and North America, regions where Internet access is widely available. Nevertheless, it is important to note that socio-economic status can still play an influential role in patterns of connectivity. Individuals from low-income households or neighbourhoods may for example lack the physical materials (computer, smartphone, network connection) necessary to access the Internet. They may also be less technically inclined than individuals with greater access to

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Van Dijk and Hacker 2003, 315.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 315–316.

³⁹² Jan A.G.M. van Dijk, “Digital Divide Research, Achievements and Shortcomings,” *Poetics* 34 (4) (2006): 221.

wireless network connections. At the same time, recent studies³⁹³ have documented the increased growth and standardisation of smartphone technologies in contemporary societies. This is most prominent in North America and Western Europe (labelled as ‘mature markets’).³⁹⁴

Broadly speaking, digital literacy skills allow individuals to surf the web with relative ease, autonomy and comfort. For this reason, I deem it more appropriate to focus on connective opportunities of digital inclusion. I approach the digital divide by considering the social, psychological and cultural backgrounds that facilitate access, adoption and the creation of web 2.0 content.³⁹⁵ Key determinants that may influence issues of digital inclusion in the context of my study lie at the intersection of education and generational differences.

Level of Education: the post-secondary experience

In contemporary times, the majority of post-secondary institutions require students to have at least a working knowledge of Internet based applications. It is now common practice for each student to receive a personalised email address upon registration. Learning platforms like Moodle and Blackboard are also commonly used to submit assignments and access course materials. Students must have basic digital literacy skills in order to access institutional websites, course registration timetables and library resources. Much of the independent research conducted for course assignments relies on publicly accessible databases, electronic journals and web-based sources.

Internet technologies have become ubiquitous across North American and Western European campuses. The post-secondary educational experience is also incredibly social, as

³⁹³ See: Yangil Park and Jengchung V. Chen, “Acceptance and Adoption of the Innovative Use of Smartphone,” *Industrial Management & Data Systems* 107 (9) (2007): 1349-1365; Hyo Kim, Gwang Jae Kim, Han Woo Park, Ronald E. Rice, “Configurations of Relationships in Different Media: FtF, email, instant messenger, mobile phone, and SMS,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (4) (2007): 1183-1207; Muhammad Sarwar and Tariq Rahim Soomro, “Impact of Smartphone’s on Society,” *European Journal of Scientific Research* 98 (2) (2013): 216-226; Lee Rainie, “Cell Phone Ownership Hits 91% of Adults,” *Pew Research Center*, June 6 2013. < <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/06/cell-phone-ownership-hits-91-of-adults/>>

³⁹⁴ Charles Arthur, “This smartphones are ubiquitous now? Just wait a few years,” *Theguardian.com*, last modified June 27, 2012, last accessed June 5, 2015.
<<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/jun/27/smartphones-iphone-mobile-market>>

³⁹⁵ Warschauer 2004, 6.

institutions strive to maintain dynamic campus environments for their student populations. The majority of student-based extracurricular activities are coordinated through email listservs, message boards, informal Facebook groups, club websites, and campus newspapers (soft and hard copy).

Although not a primary focus of this thesis, I recognise that post-secondary institutions can indeed function as a springboard for more direct involvement in advocacy networks and politically or culturally based activities. Exposure to student clubs, academic courses, instructors and fellow classmates may motivate individuals to take a more active interest in specific socio-political issues. Recent graduates—or people with higher levels of education generally—may be overrepresented in the sample data compared to those with lower levels of education for these reasons especially.

Level of Education: Employment Surroundings

From the above, we can assume that individuals who obtained their post-secondary education after the year 2000 have used Internet technologies for non-entertainment media consumption purposes.³⁹⁶ Van Dijk points out that those with higher levels of education (and comparatively higher incomes) tend to use computer databases, spreadsheets, and bookkeeping applications more frequently than people with lower levels of education (with comparatively lower incomes).³⁹⁷ Being able to work with computer software like Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook) is now an essential requirement in most workplace environments. Expectations of digital literacy will only rise in future, with more and more offices introducing Google applications, cloud computing and cloud storage to the workplace.³⁹⁸ Those with higher levels of education may be expected to maintain a basic level of digital literacy for employment purposes, and will experience greater digital inclusion through various workplace connective opportunities.

³⁹⁶ Van Dijk 2006, 181.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Julia Bort, “Google shares its plan to nab 80% of Microsoft’s Office business,” *BusinessInsider*, last modified February 8, 2015. Last accessed June 5, 2015. < <http://uk.businessinsider.com/google-plan-to-beat-microsoft-office-2015-2?r=US&IR=T#ixzz3hyd6FJmn>>

3.12 Conclusion

The above research design employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in its investigation of the web's enabling and supportive function in contemporary diaspora identity politics. Beyond the confines of territoriality, the web is a platform of transnational exchange, encouraging interactive engagement from its users. The transformative potential of this dynamic user-centred platform can be used to catapult and leverage identity-based political bonds into world affairs. As such, the approach taken as far as the methodology of this thesis is concerned was to begin with a quantitative analysis through web-based crawls conducted for the e-Diasporas atlas. This was followed by website filtering and corpus mapping based on the defined classification scheme (website, actor, activity, language, location). The statistical data from the corpus datasets was then used to create a sample of websites to conduct web-based content analysis. Following these online-led approaches, the research was fleshed out with qualitative assessments in the form of interviews undertaken in person, on Skype or via social media and email platforms. These interviews were undertaken according to pre-established ethical procedures and used to validate and support the quantitative analysis. Having laid out the methodological framework undertaken for this thesis, we turn now to the empirical analysis of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics.

IV

4. SIKH ONLINE IDENTITY POLITICS

“...the goal of the Sikh Activist Network is to constantly be in flux...identity is always in flux because if we become stagnant then we become those old people sitting in chairs. And it’s up to the next generation that keep taking it over to determine the direction...”³⁹⁹

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents web-based representations of Sikh identity politics. Defined by a collective sense of religious identity, Sikh virtual space reinforces and builds upon offline Gurdwara (temple) community institutions. The Gurdwara remains an important reference point for community members and serves as the primary focal hub or mobilising structure for local congregation, active worship, cultural activities and social events across countries of settlement. Sikh virtual space offers an alternative resource hub for participant members to openly renegotiate their identities and self-defined commitments to collective faith with few barriers. The interpretative flexibility of user-generated online platforms inherently challenges the top-down information dissemination structures characteristic of Gurdwara institutions. Bypassing Gurdwara hierarchies, online actors use ‘ethno-religious grammar’ and Sikh-specific symbols as a resource to infuse cyberspace with meaning and better situate their diasporic experiences relative to host country socio-political realities. The research will show that younger generations play a crucial role in maintaining and preserving representations of the Sikh identity online, and corpus statistics indicate that the majority of Sikh virtual activities link through religious, community and cultural agendas. Such findings indicate links that are untraceable via standard triadic approaches. Most notably, these dispersed non-state actors use online platforms as a resource to challenge the post 9/11 ‘Turban Politics’, which have emerged as a key issue of concern for the faith-based transnational community.

³⁹⁹ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

4.1.1 Chapter Structure

In exploring the online representations of Sikh diaspora politics, the chapter begins with an overview of the common features that bind Sikh collective identities. Background information on migration patterns, Sikh articles of faith, Gurdwara institutional structures and grievance issue agendas are discussed in this section to contextualise contemporary diaspora politics. A detailed analysis of Sikh virtual space follows, introducing corpus findings from the web cartography results of the Sikh e-Diaspora Atlas. The visual representations and statistical data presented in this chapter can be accessed through the e-Diasporas Atlas website (map.e-diasporas.fr). Religious websites distinguish themselves as resource hubs, and provide access to Sikh scripture and information on faith-based practices including Sikh articles of faith.

Community based websites, while infused with ethno-religious grammar, direct attention to issues in the ancestral homeland and across countries of settlement. Cultural activities focus on festivals, art and folk music, and maintain an important role in public representations of Sikh identity. Activity subsets are analysed in great detail in this section to show blog network linkages.

The corpus findings are then complemented with web-based content analysis results, allowing a clearer understanding of the dominant narratives mobilised online. The final section of the chapter draws on actor interviews to assess the relationship between online and offline Sikh identity politics. In their reflections, actors involved in diaspora politics are commonly noted to describe the web as a platform for community representation and identity formation. Online mobilisation activities redress community grievances and Sikh religious identity through the framework of human rights as a way to gain visibility in world affairs.

4.2 Background

4.2.1 Migration Patterns

The Sikh diaspora, rooted in the ‘land of five rivers’ (Punjab, India), is largely considered a community of voluntary economic migrants. Sikhs represent only 2% of India’s total

population, but make up 7% (20 million) of the total Indian diaspora worldwide.⁴⁰⁰ The majority of migration from Punjab occurred in the 1960s, with notable communities forming in the UK, Canada, and the US. As of 2005, populations are as follows: 336,179 in the UK, 278,415 in Canada and 250,000 in the US.⁴⁰¹ Prior to the 1960s, as subjects of the British Raj (1858–1947), the Sikhs maintained a relationship of privilege with colonial powers largely due to their military and training tactics. Between the 1860s and 1940s many Sikh men were recruited by UK authorities as police and military personnel for various colonial affairs.⁴⁰² However, records indicate that as early as the 1910s some 8,000 Sikhs were noted to have migrated to North America.⁴⁰³ For members of the diaspora, links to British colonial powers carries with it a sense of historical significance and pride, especially in the context of war related services.

4.2.2 Religious Identity: Articles of Faith

The Sikh collective identity is maintained through religious affinity, conceptions of nationhood and diasporic connections.⁴⁰⁴ Founded in the 15th century by Guru Nanak, Sikhism is one of the youngest major world religions, with an estimated 25 million followers.⁴⁰⁵ Perceptions surrounding faith-based attachments to territory (Punjab) have differed over time, depending on interpretations and commitments to the Khalsa Panth (today understood as the transnational Sikh community). A progressive religion, Sikhism advocates equal rights for all human beings regardless of caste or creed. The image of the spirited warrior is perhaps best represented by the *Khanda* (an emblem similar to the Cross in Christianity), which includes a double-edged blade and two curved swords. Religious observance is most concretely linked to the Khalsa (purity), more specifically the five K's introduced by the 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, of which *kes* (Turban and beard)

⁴⁰⁰ Verne A. Dusenbery, Darshan Singh Tatla and Satnam Chana, eds., *Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Global Giving for Local Good* (New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University of Press, 2009), 11.

⁴⁰¹ Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain: The making of a community* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2006), 32.

⁴⁰² Brian Keith Axel, "Sikh Domains: Information Technology, Global Conflict, and the Struggles for Khalistan – A Sovereign Sikh State," *Social Science Research Council, Information Technology and International Cooperation Program* (2006): 2.

⁴⁰³ Dusenbery et al. 2009, 9.

⁴⁰⁴ Giorgio Shani, *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 143.

⁴⁰⁵ Sikhism has the 5th largest following behind Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

serves as the predominant form of self-identification of the faith today.⁴⁰⁶ Equally customary is the adoption of the name Singh (lion) for males and Kaur (princess) for females, which although introduced by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, remains a source of communal identity, pride and unity between dispersed populations.

4.2.3 The Gurdwara as a Focal Hub

With a history of decades of emigration, pockets of Sikhs are well established in various immigration hubs. In today's digital age, institutions such as the Gurdwara function as mobilising structures and continue to promote communal values and symbolic unity between local factions. As religious institutions, Gurdwaras are sites of collective worship, community cohesion and cultural dissemination for Sikhs.⁴⁰⁷ Migration patterns have had a major influence in the establishment of Gurdwaras globally. In Britain alone, the number of Gurdwaras has steadily increased from only 33 in 1971 to 69 in 1981, 139 in 1991 and an estimated 250 today.⁴⁰⁸ Medium to large scale Gurdwara institutions are estimated to receive an annual income of between £100,000 and £300,000.⁴⁰⁹ Sources of income include weekly congregation offerings, dedicated scripture readings, government grants, birth, death and marriage ceremonies.⁴¹⁰ As a focal hub for the community, Gurdwaras have allowed diasporic actors to localise representations of the Sikh identity within host countries. Many Gurdwaras have adapted their functionalities to fit the socio-political realities of host country populations. With the "acceptance of ideological multiculturalism" in the UK, Gurdwaras maintained strong links with the Labour Party during the 1980s and 1990s; in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 7/7 UK terrorist attacks, they have increasingly become a site for interfaith dialogue.⁴¹¹

Gurdwaras remain ingrained in contemporary Sikh identity politics, and function as mobilising structures for online advocacy. These community institutions may on the surface

⁴⁰⁶ Dawinder S. Sidhu and Neha Singh Gohil, "The Sikh Turban: Post-9/11 Challenges to this Article of Faith," *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion* 9 (2008): 7. Guru Gobind Singh established the 'Khalsa' (Kirpan, Kara, Kes, Kanga, Kach: the 5 K's)

⁴⁰⁷ Gurharpal Singh, "Gurdwaras and Community-Building among British Sikhs," *Contemporary South Asia* 15 (2) (2006): 147.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 157.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

appear as cohesive, but they are independently managed at the local level, and questions of influence, control and legitimacy have continued to be a source of much conflict within and between congregations. Gurdwaras remain male-dominated, and have often been criticised for their lack of transparency and democratic decision-making processes.⁴¹² How these institutions exactly function is “shrouded in mystery” for many.⁴¹³ However, criticisms of daily administrative affairs do not detract from the overall importance of the Gurdwara for Sikhs. Both symbolically and in practice, the Gurdwara remains fundamental to contemporary understandings of collective Sikh identity. Gurdwaras are understood as the gateway to Sikhism, and maintain authority as a community hub for ethno-religious practices and faith-based teachings.

4.2.4 Sikh Grievances: Unity through Collective Trauma

In contemporary times, Sikh narratives of injustice and marginalisation are rooted in three critical events: the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and most importantly the desecration of the Golden Temple in 1984. These traumatic events continue to guide narratives of persecution and human rights violations even today.⁴¹⁴ On April 15 1919, a sacred day commemorating Guru Gobind Singh and the creation of the Khalsa (celebrated as Vaisakhi), British soldiers stormed Jallianwala Bagh, a few hundred yards away from the Golden Temple in Amritsar, killing 379 people and wounding over 1000.⁴¹⁵ The Jallianwala Bagh massacre was one of the bloodiest affairs in contemporary Sikh history, and marks a turning point in Sikh-British affairs. The events remain contentious even today, with Prime Minister David Cameron’s commemorative visit in February of 2013 causing controversy across the transnational community.⁴¹⁶ Sikh grievances became more pronounced during the 1930s and 1940s, when in response to calls for independence, British

⁴¹² Ibid., 160.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Dominika Sokol, “Sikh Diaspora in Cyberspace: The Representation of Khalistan on the World Wide Web and Its Legal Context,” *Masaryk UJL & Tech* 1 (2007): 224.

⁴¹⁵ Sidhu and Gohil 2007, 43.

⁴¹⁶ “Cameron defends not saying sorry for Jallianwala,” *Thehindu.com*, last modified February 21, 2013, last accessed March 20, 2014. <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/cameron-defends-not-saying-sorry-for-jallianwala-bagh/article4434424.ece>> “David Cameron marks British 1919 Amritsar massacre,” *BBC.co.uk*, last modified February 20, 2013, last accessed March 20, 2014. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21515360>>

authorities re-drew the geographical lines of Punjab three times.⁴¹⁷ 1947 marked the splitting of the Sikh ancestral homeland of Punjab in favour of two separate states, India and Pakistan. Sikh grievances associated with the Partition focus on unanswered calls for statehood (Khalistan or ‘land of the pure’) as well as the violence that ensued during the resettlement process during which 200,000 people were killed.⁴¹⁸

4.2.5 Sikh Solidarity and the Injustice of 1984

Today, Sikh grievance narratives focus mainly on the events of June 6 1984, with Operation Blue Star considered the ultimate “slur on the nation’s dignity.”⁴¹⁹ On a day of mass pilgrimage, some 2,000 were estimated dead when in response to increased Sikh protests, militancy and calls for self-determination, then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered armed forces to swarm the holiest of Sikh shrines, the Golden Temple.⁴²⁰ The symbolic authority Sikhs ascribe to the Golden Temple cannot be underestimated. An attack on the Golden Temple was and continues to be considered a direct attack on the Sikh identity and the Sikh nation. Operation Blue Star remains the single most important political event in contemporary Sikh mobilisations. Frustrated with the lack of accountability for the massacre, the events of 1984 united the dispersed populations in condemnation. The sense of victimhood and injustice resonated throughout all countries of settlement, resulting in an increase in remittances to the homeland and various coordinated protests outside of Indian embassies across the globe.⁴²¹

On June 10 1984, in response to the massacre, some 25,000 Sikhs in London engaged in protests chanting “*Khalistan Zindabad!*” (long live the Sikh state).⁴²² This coincided with other mass protests in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.⁴²³ The events of 1984 fuelled increased support for the Khalistani secessionist movement, which until this time had not been considered a community priority.

⁴¹⁷ Axel 2006, 1.

⁴¹⁸ After the 1947 Independence, 2 million people become refugees, resettling on the right side of the Radcliffe Boundary Line, with an estimated 200,000 people dead during the process, see: Dusenbery et al. 2009, 11.

⁴¹⁹ Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 28.

⁴²⁰ Axel 2006, 2.

⁴²¹ Dusenbery et al. 2009, 51.

⁴²² Singh and Tatla 2006, 105.

⁴²³ Tatla 1999, 114.

One of the more notable series of public demonstrations were the champagne celebrations in Birmingham, UK in November 1984, following Prime Minister Gandhi's assassination at the hands of her two Sikh bodyguards.⁴²⁴

When considering the role of Operation Blue Star in perpetuating Sikh grievance narratives, a distinction must be made between members who support the preservation of the *panth* (Sikh community) and those promoting independent statehood in the form of Khalistan. Opinions on Sikh independence and Khalistani statehood depend on the context in which the massacre is framed. Informed by host country social fabric, many individuals expressed outrage at the Indian government, yet did not entirely support the idea of a theocratic Sikh state. Sikhs have grown increasingly sceptical of the militant aspects of the Khalistani movement, as it remains unclear how Sikh governing structures would operate if ever established. The Khalistani secessionist movement has largely disappeared from the spectrum of Sikh public dialogue. In contemporary times, Khalistan has emerged as a point of contention between moderates and those who staunchly support Sikh statehood.⁴²⁵ Reflections on online performance show that moderates increasingly view Khalistan symbolically, as a collective identity separate from any idea of statehood. Generational shifts have led community members, particularly youth populations to be hesitant of faith-led conceptions of statehood. Rather than politicising their faith, (which can be off-putting for second-generation youth), actors increasingly seek to legitimise grievances associated with the events of 1984 via expressive forms of politics now available online, by describing the events through frames of universal human rights.

Demanding justice for the victims of the attacks, these actors allege that 1984's Operation Blue Star mimicked that of genocide, and increasingly strive to educate and inform populations in host countries of the grave traumas experienced at the hands of Indian officials. In the digital age, actors have directed their grievance claims to the web, with virtual museums and online petitions for justice providing innovative ways of commemorating the tragedy. The web has effectively decentralised Khalistan⁴²⁶—separating identity from territory. By connecting the local to the global, actors seek to maintain and

⁴²⁴ Singh and Tatla 2006, 106.

⁴²⁵ Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, *The Sikh diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 183.

⁴²⁶ Sokol 2007, 228.

preserve the Khalsa *panth* (the greater Sikh community) online with limited territorial constraints.⁴²⁷

As the research findings will show, Sikh virtual space is primarily maintained by and directed towards member participants across various countries of settlement, rather than any reference to a homeland. By using digital networks to spread elements of collective identity to a transnational audience, actors involved in Sikh diaspora politics engage in mobilisation processes that may or may not directly involve Gurdwara institutions. Tensions between networked actors do exist, and centre on competing interpretations of Sikh identity (articles of faith) as shaped by host country socio-political realities. In an effort to attract wider support for identity-infused political claims, online representations of community grievances and past traumas are often introduced through the “politics of recognition” and cater to the sensibilities of host country audiences.⁴²⁸ In real terms, this means that grievances and contentious issue agendas are articulated through rights-based discourse, supporting my argument by mimicking the democratic principles promoted by international bodies like the UN.

4.3 Virtual Platforms: Web Cartography - the Sikh e-Diaspora Atlas

Informed by the methodological framework of the e-Diasporas atlas project,⁴²⁹ the following analysis presents the results of analysing the Sikh e-diaspora corpus. Website linkages provide a better understanding of the transnational identity-based bonds that link to communicate and construct Sikh diaspora politics. Corpus websites are therefore considered to be an active representation of the Sikh diaspora online. Statistical data and digital mapping results obtained from the e-Diasporas Atlas project highlight the fact that the majority of online Sikh activity is focused on issues related to religion, community and culture. By tracing these connections, I show that the online community does not mimic the iron-clad structures of the triadic model, but exists now in a form that is much more multidimensional and global.

⁴²⁷ Shani 2007, 128.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁴²⁹ See methodology section of this study for a more detail account of the methodological and technical tools employed. All of the data presented in this virtual analysis can be accessed through the interactive maps: < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section§ion=27>>

The ‘Sikh diaspora’ and patterns of host country settlement are rooted in decades of voluntary economic migration. As a population bound by religious affinity, actors involved in diaspora politics can use the technical capabilities and connective resources of the Internet to support and enable new forms of Sikh identity politics. In contemporary times, online articulations of collective identity complement Gurdwara community institutions and are maintained by weaker (resource poor) actors (individuals, informal groups). These leaderless web-based networks are flexible and are not constrained by vertical (hierarchical) structures characteristic of Gurdwara institutions. Instead, online platforms promote expressive discussion and debate between increasingly diverse sets of people whose transnational interactions have the potential to become part of world affairs.

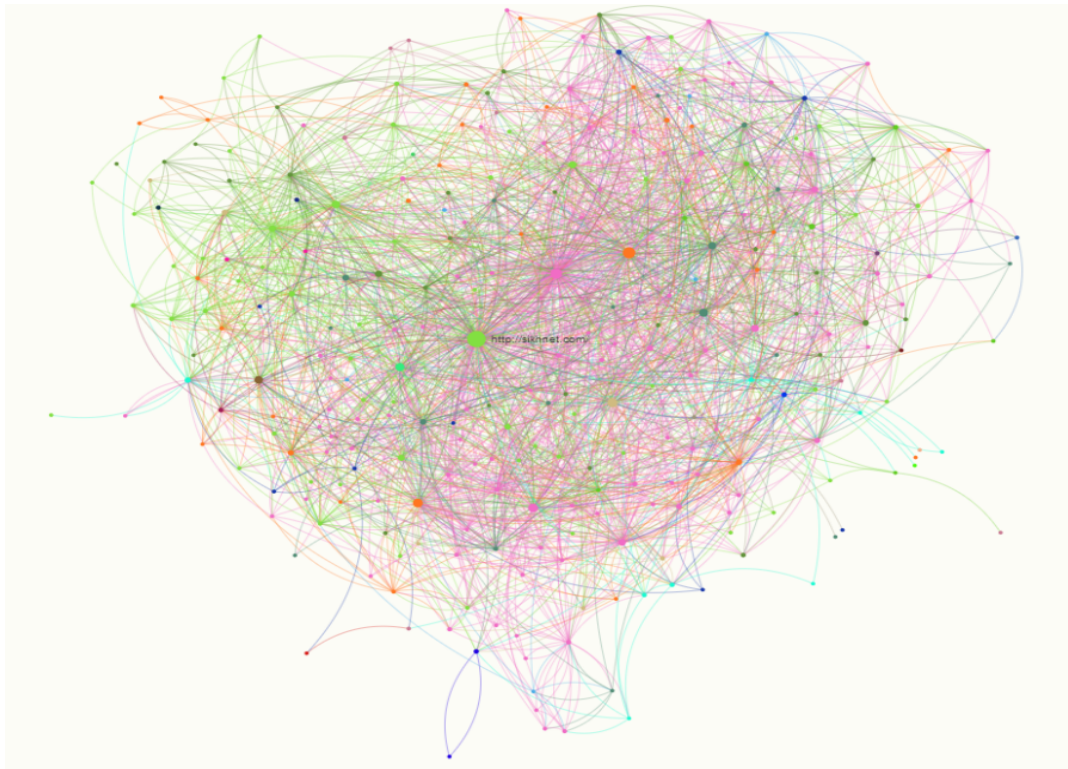
The analysis of the Sikh corpus highlights the extensive use of communal reference points and symbolic markers, most often in the form of historical narratives, cultural customs and ethno-religious phraseology. Combined with identity-specific audio and visual splash imagery, Sikh websites reinforce sentiments of attachment and familiarity as experienced offline by ordinary people. Through visual and statistical analysis, this portion of the case study supports my argument by looking beyond host-homeland links to trace comparably neglected online mobilisation processes. Data presented is considered a point of inference to better understand how Sikh diaspora politics are negotiated online, and how these transnational linkages impact global politics. With focus on religion, community and culture, the following section introduces key findings from the Sikh corpus as completed for the e-Diasporas atlas project.

4.3.1 Sikh Corpus - Online Activity

The Sikh corpus comprises 290 nodes (websites), which—as explained in the methodological section of this study—was created through a series of automatic crawls as part of the e-Diasporas atlas project. Visual cartographic representation of the mapped results also follows the coding and classification discussed in the methodology section. As this thesis is interested in uncovering the identity-based political bonds that link to construct online diaspora politics, the following analysis focuses primarily on the activity classification of the

Sikh corpus.⁴³⁰ Emphasis is placed on tracing node linkages (websites) in terms of influence and representation within the corpus network.

Figure 4.1 Sikh Corpus Activity Map



⁴³⁰ The corpus is classified based on the following: type of site, actor, activity, secondary activity, location, language. Sikh Corpus – Type of Activity. < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5§ion=27>>

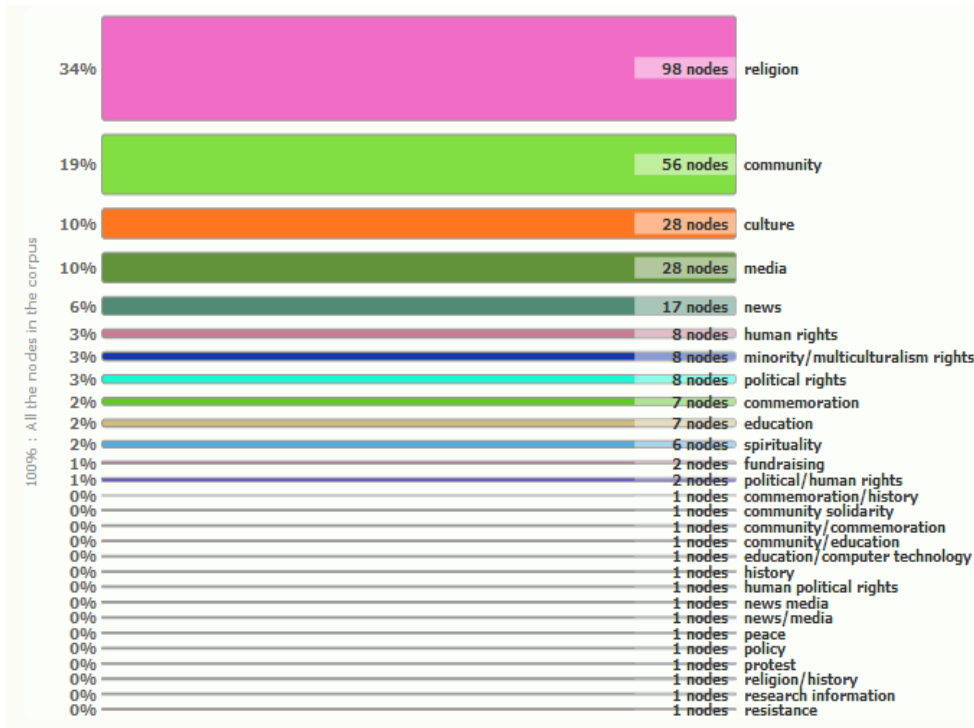


Figure 4.1 shows that the majority of online exchanges linking corpus nodes cluster around themes of religion, community, culture and media (collectively accounting for 210 of the 290 corpus nodes). Steered by three key corpus authorities—sikhnet.com, sikhitothemax.com, and sikhiwiki.org—node linkages are especially dense in the centre of the map. These three corpus authorities will be discussed in greater detail below, and serve as key reference points for the majority of Sikh-specific virtual activity networks. While ethno-religiously specific, these websites maintain stylistically open and informative interfaces and serve as primary resources for networked corpus nodes. Sikhnet.com remains the source authority hub for the community cluster on the top left of the corpus, and bridges community websites to religious websites. As visible in the activity isolation, religion-based node linkages form much of the structure of the overall corpus map. We note that religious hyperlinks set the loose boundaries at the bottom of the corpus, and are also very dense in the middle of the structure, a high traffic area.

Beyond visual representations, statistical data obtained from mapping allows for a more in depth investigation of the proportional influence and activity flow within the corpus. First, we can look to node linkage statistics (edges) to better understand the overall influence, authority and reach of key corpus activities.

Linking Corpus Node Edges

| Edges Related to the entire Sikh Corpus (% of influence overall within the network) | |
|--|-----|
| Religion | 54% |
| Community | 36% |
| Culture | 20% |

The above table shows the overall influence of activities by considering the total number of linkages between corpus nodes. As expected, religion-based nodes maintain a substantial presence throughout the Sikh corpus, and also maintain edges (inbound and outbound linkages) over more than half of the entire Sikh activity corpus. We can now examine corpus numerical data to gain a better idea of the communicative flow between and within activity subsets.

| Corpus Activity | Corpus Nodes | Corpus Representation | Inbound Density | Internal Density | Outbound Density |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Religion | 98 | 34% | 2.3 | 3.9 | 3.3 |
| Community | 56 | 19% | 3.4 | 4 | 2.9 |
| Culture | 28 | 10% | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.1 |
| Media | 28 | 10% | 2.3 | 2.7 | 2.9 |
| News | 17 | 6% | 4.2 | 8 | 3.8 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|----|-----|------|-----|
| Human Rights | 8 | 3% | 0.8 | 6.3 | 0.9 |
| Minority/Multi cultural Rights | 8 | 3% | 2 | 4.7 | 1.9 |
| Political Rights | 8 | 3% | 2.7 | 10.9 | 2.9 |

The table above presents numerical and statistical data retrieved from the Sikh activity corpus, and provides the total number of corpus nodes for the most dominant activity subsets. Corpus representation is calculated relative to the number of nodes within the corpus (290 in total). Density is understood as the flow of linkages between and within activity subsets. Inbound density signifies the flow of external nodes linking in to the particular subset activity, whereas outbound density signifies linking out to nodes beyond the activity subset. Internal density is understood as the linkages between nodes belonging to the same activity subset. To clarify: the higher the density, the greater the number of hyperlinks flowing through subset nodes.

Initial observations from the above data highlight a disproportionately higher internal density for news, human rights, minority/multicultural rights, and political rights-based activities. This means that within each of these subset activities, nodes carry a comparatively higher proportion of internal mutual linkages (compared to linkages flowing in and out of the subset). A higher internal density indicates a more in-depth, clustered relationship between activity nodes, which although dense, lack sufficient inbound and outbound flows to maintain significant corpus authority or to gain external attention. The scope and reach of news (6% of total corpus nodes), human rights, minority/multicultural rights and political rights (9% of total corpus nodes) activities are comparatively underrepresented across Sikh virtual space. This differs from online activity focused on religion, community and culture, which collectively account for 63% of all nodes, and as presented below, maintain much higher authority over the content circulated within the corpus.

Top 10 (authoritative) Sikh diaspora Websites

| Website | | Actor | Activity | Language | Location | Inbound Links |
|---|------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------|
| http://sikhnet.com/ | Site | Group | Community | English | N/A | 168 |
| http://sikhitothemax.com/ | Site | Group | Culture | English | UK | 97 |
| http://sikhiwiki.org/ | Site | Group | Religion | English | N/A | 89 |
| http://allaboutsikhs.com/ | Site | Group | Education | English | N/A | 71 |
| http://sikhs.org/ | Site | Group | Culture | English | USA | 68 |
| http://sgpc.net/ | Site | Organisation | Religion | Punjabi English | India | 67 |
| http://unitedsikhs.org/ | Site | Organisation | Peace | English | USA | 57 |
| http://panthic.org/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | Punjabi English | USA | 57 |
| http://sikhchic.com/ | News Group | Media Organisation | Community | English | N/A | 53 |
| http://sikhcoalition.org/ | Site | Organisation | Human Political Rights | English | USA | 51 |

This table presents the top ten Sikh corpus authorities by inbound linkages. Most notable are the empowering capabilities of the web, shown by identity-based commonalities between website classifications. For example, website domain names carry ethno-religious markers and promote Sikh collective identity (key words: panthic, coalition, united). Website actors

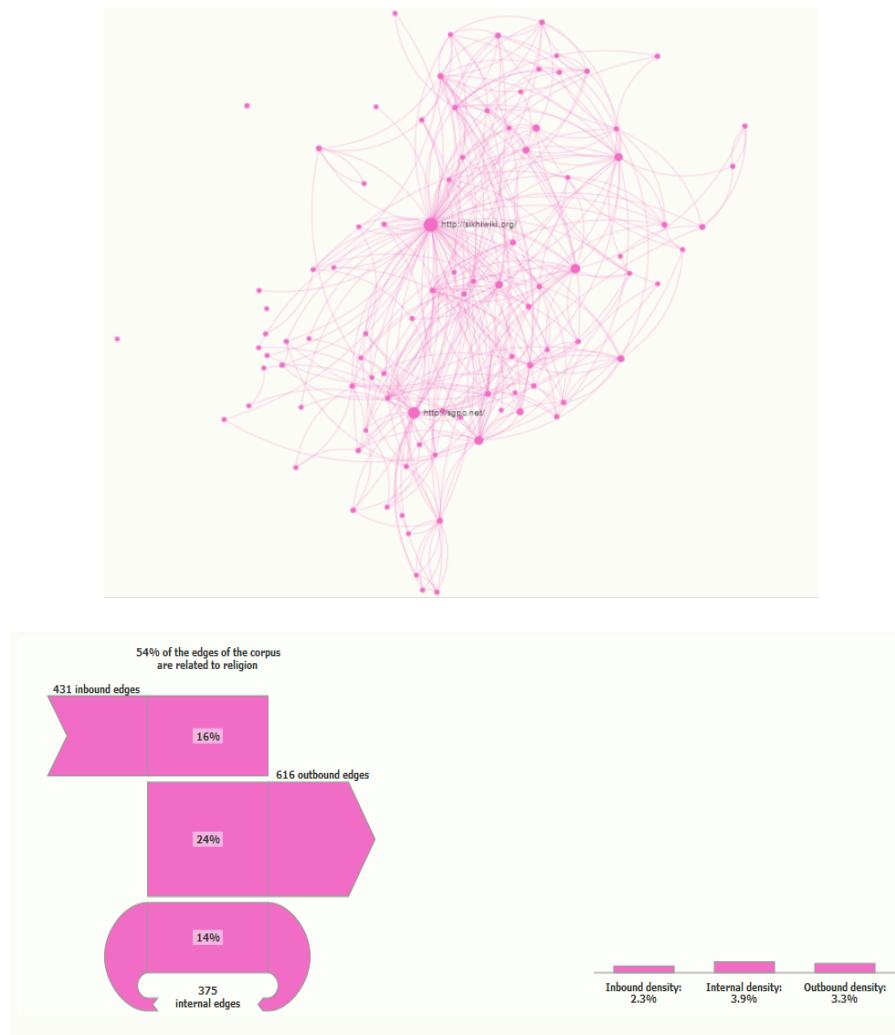
are large-scale (not individual bloggers), and do not characteristically reference physical territory, regions or offline locales. It should be noted that sgpc.net (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee) is the only node registered to an on-the-ground institution located in Punjab (the Sikh ancestral homeland).⁴³¹ The SGPC serves as the administrative authority of many Gurdwaras in Northern India, including the Harmandir Sahib (more commonly referred to the Golden Temple) in Amritsar. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the Golden Temple remains the single most important place of worship for the greater Sikh community.

The above corpus websites maintain their authority because moderators offer online resources and knowledge for those wishing to access Sikh-specific information. This includes access to various religious scriptures and information about cultural festivals and community events taking place globally. Focusing on providing an additional platform for community members, the moderators in charge of these corpus authorities aim to spread content throughout Sikh-specific websites. These corpus authorities lack a distinct ‘rights-based’ agenda, and instead offer a point of reference for individuals interested in ethno-religious resources to explore (and link in) at their own discretion. To be clear, ‘rights-based’ discourse does exist within the authority subset (unitedsikhs.org, sikhcoalition.org), but website content is characteristically framed through normative aspects of faith, which in turn are used to tackle contemporary threats to the Sikh identity, most often associated with post 9/11 ‘Turban Politics’. As presented in the corpus findings below, the majority of online activities reproduce specific ethno-religious markers which aim to strengthen and preserve Sikh collective identities.

⁴³¹ Administrative contact as retrieved from coolwhois.com (IP address locator) on February 17, 2014: SHIROMINI GURDWARA PRABANDHAK COMMITTEE, TEJA SINGH SAMANDARI HALL, AMRITSAR, PUNJAB 143001, INDIA, Telephone: 911832546503 Fax: 911832533941. Email: infor@sgpc.net.

4.3.2 Sikh Corpus - Religious Virtual Activity

Figure 4.2 Sikh Corpus - Type of Activity - Religion



Comprising of 98 nodes (34% of all corpus activity), the above map presents a virtual snapshot of religion-based corpus websites.⁴³² If compared against the Sikh activity map, we note the structural influence of religious nodes, which both centre and maintain the link boundaries of the corpus. Content disseminated from religious nodes form the structure on the right side of the corpus and are particularly dense in the centre. The isolation highlights *sikhwihi.org* as a central authority, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Corpus

⁴³² Sikh Corpus - Type of Activity - Religion. < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5§ion=27&value=religion> >

statistics indicate that internal links (3.9%) between religion-based nodes are comparatively more dense than inbound or outbound flows (linkages from other primary activity subsets). This means that moderators of religious based websites more frequently cross-reference each other, signifying a relationship of interactive and communicative connectivity within the subset. Building from community Gurdwara institutions, religion remains the principal reference point in online representations of the Sikh diaspora. However, the interpretative flexibility of user-generated online platforms means that articulations of the Sikh faith assume a multiplicity of understandings and self-imposed (personalised) commitments. Religious websites link through the language of *Sikhi*, establishing connections through the practice and connection of identity rather than any ties or connections with the homeland, which guides the ethno-religious grammatical boundaries for most of the corpus. The above isolation traces faith as the structural baseline for online Sikh-centric engagements. As presented below, nodes based in religion maintain complex linkages within the corpus.

Figure 4.3 Sikh Corpus Religion Hyperlink Flow (edges)

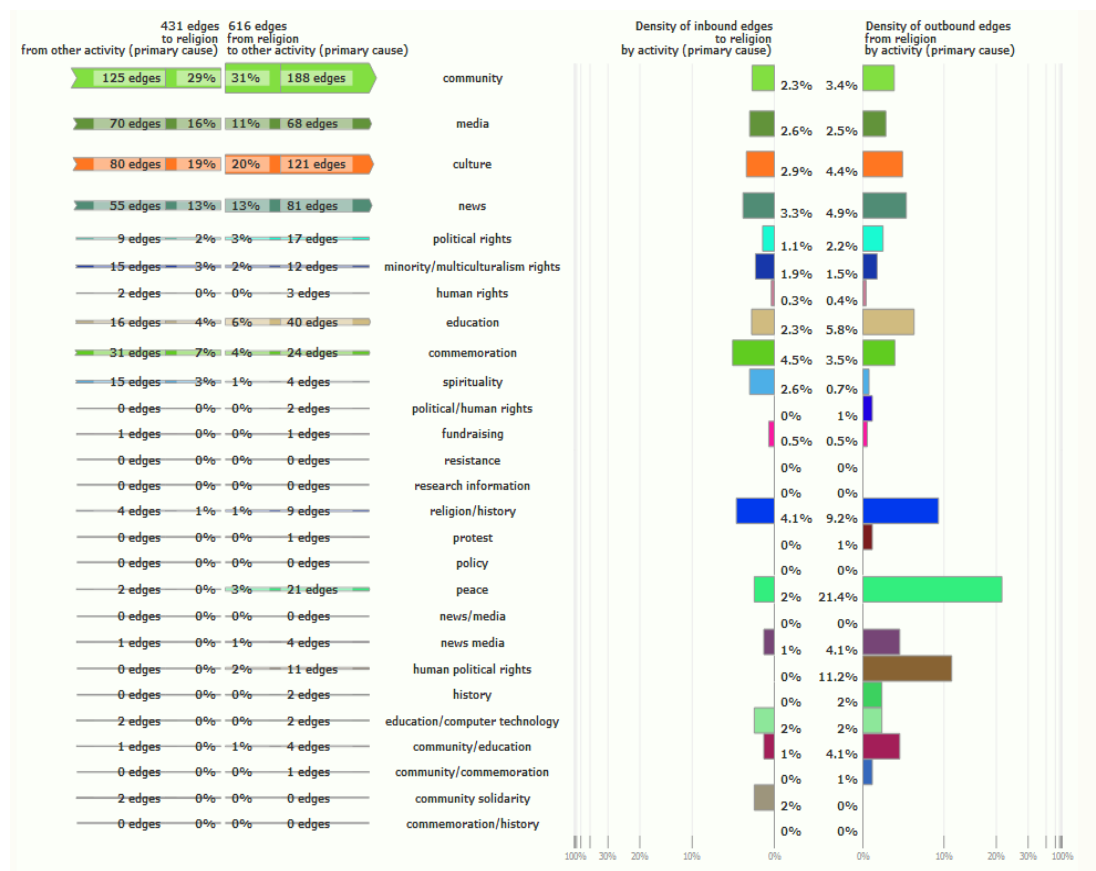


Figure 4.3 presents the inbound and outbound linkages stemming from religion-based activity website nodes. With a greater number of linkages flowing outwards, religion maintains a significant ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relationship with nodes based in community (188 links), culture (121 links), news (81 links) and education (40 links). Inbound linkages from these external activity node subsets accounts for a total of 266 links, a substantial contribution to the overall corpus network structure. As a point of reference, moderators of religion-based nodes link into these external activities in an attempt to remain topically current and relevant across issue agendas affecting diasporic affairs. In these cases, ethnicity, as opposed to religious observance, serves as the connective bridge between online activities. Moderators of nodes focusing on community, culture, news and education also seek to provide audiences with informative Sikh-specific online resources.

This differs from media, minority/multiculturalism rights, commemoration or spirituality-based nodes, with which religious activity maintains an ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship. Spirituality-based nodes differ from religion-based activity in that website content focuses on active yoga practices and reflects more personalised interpretative connections with holy spirits. The higher inbound flow is attributed to religious nodes providing key informative resources for faith-based knowledge. Religious websites provide access to scripture, prayer customs and communal history which, while rooted in the ancestral homeland, facilitate global interactive engagements through the web that specialise in media, commemoration and spirituality. Websites focus on minority/multiculturalist rights discuss the Sikh faith in terms of rights-based discourse. In such cases, religion maintains much interpretative flexibility and moderators present the Sikh faith by empowering normative underpinnings of equality, justice and human rights.

One of the notable features of Sikh corpus activity is the extensive reference to collective identities through symbolic markers and ethno-religious grammar. Corpus findings for example indicate substantial dissemination of religious hymns throughout Sikh webspace (akj.org [Akhand Keertanee Jathaa], gurbani.org, keertan.org, keertan.net, sikhroots.com, ektaone.com). These religious websites maintain their online authority by offering real-time audio and visual feeds of various Gurdwara services across the globe.

Subgraph Authorities

(Nodes inside religion that are cited by the most nodes in religion)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM religion |
|---|--------------------------------|
| http://sikhiwiki.org/ | 35 |
| http://sgpc.net/ | 33 |
| http://akj.org/ | 21 |
| http://gurbani.org/ | 17 |
| http://manvirsingh.blogspot.com/ | 15 |
| http://keertan.org/ | 13 |
| http://sikhroots.com/ | 12 |
| http://ektaone.com/ | 11 |
| http://keertan.net/ | 10 |
| http://sikhlionz.com/ | 9 |

Representative Authorities

(Nodes inside religion that are cited by the most nodes in other activity

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://sikhiwiki.org/ | 54 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://sgpc.net/ | 34 |
| http://akj.org/ | 24 |
| http://gurbani.org/ | 21 |
| http://manvirsingh.blogspot.com/ | 17 |
| http://panthkhalsa.org/ | 15 |
| http://ektaone.com/ | 15 |
| http://keertan.org/ | 15 |
| http://sikhionz.com/ | 13 |
| http://sikhroots.com/ | 10 |

Online statistics reaffirm the importance of sikhhiwiki.org; the central authority of religious based corpus activity. Stylistically, the sikhhiwiki.org interface is presented in saffron-yellow and blue, colours that carry great symbolic importance within the Sikh faith.⁴³³ We equally note the use of key religious emblems (Khanda and Ik Onkar), Gurus and Turbans. This is complemented with daily updates (quotes and news) reinforcing sentiments of transnational collective unity between all followers of the faith, regardless of their ground location. Information is easily accessed through organised subheadings and a site-specific search engine. Although Sikh-specific, the interface mimics stylistic aspects of the popular user-generated encyclopaedia Wikipedia. As a virtual reference point for the Sikh knowledge, sikhhiwiki.org is infused with symbolic meaning, and offers an exploratory opportunity for individualised identity (re)negotiation.

⁴³³ These colors are associated with Sikh warriors and various emblems that allude to the Nihang militia.

Figure 4.4 Sikhiwiki.org



As indicated by the following node exploration, sikhiwiki.org⁴³⁴ maintains a significant online reach. Linkage findings suggest the website to be heavily networked with virtual neighbours (beyond religious based nodes). As a key corpus authority, moderators of sikhiwiki.org are equally active in maintaining outbound relational links, citing 131 nodes within the corpus.

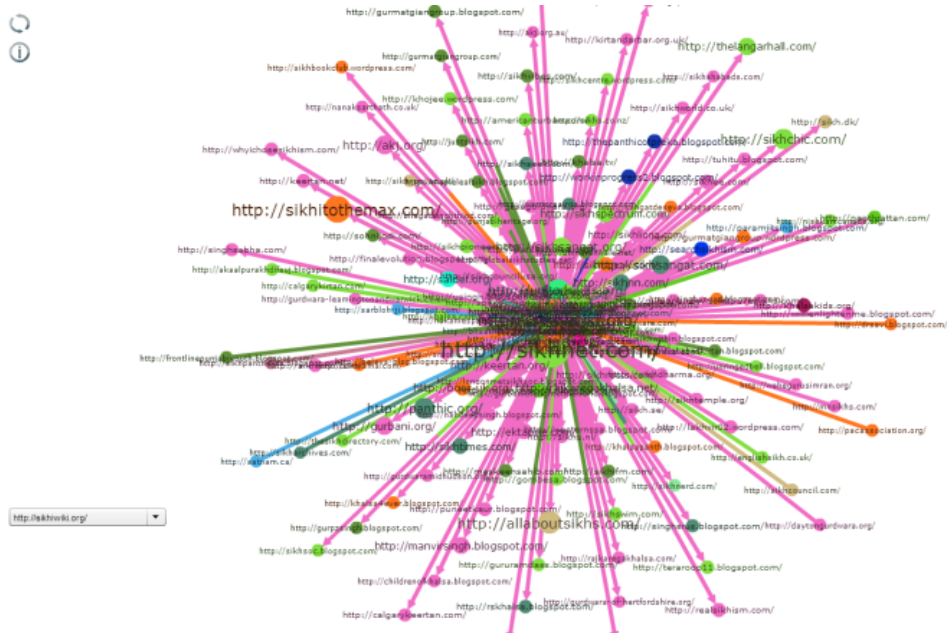
Sikhiwiki.org Neighbours⁴³⁵

| Referrers (Nodes that cite http://sikhiwiki.org/) | Mutually linked neighbours (Nodes that cite and are cited by http://sikhiwiki.org/) | Cited (Nodes that are cited by http://sikhiwiki.org/) |
|---|--|---|
| 89 | 47 | 131 |

⁴³⁴ "Sikhi Wiki – Encyclomedia of the Sikhs," last accessed November 12, 2012.
<http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Main_Page>

⁴³⁵ Sikhiwiki.org Corpus Node Exploration.
<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=72&map=59&node=219§ion=27>>

Figure 4.5 Sikhiwiki.org Node Linkage Exploration



External attracting authority findings allow us to track outbound flow and uncover the websites that receive the most traffic from religious links. Statistics indicate that religion-based nodes maintain strong links with community and culturally based activity nodes. Most notable is the linking in to dominant corpus authorities: sikhnet.com (community) and sikhithemax.com (culture).

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside religion that are cited by the most nodes in religion

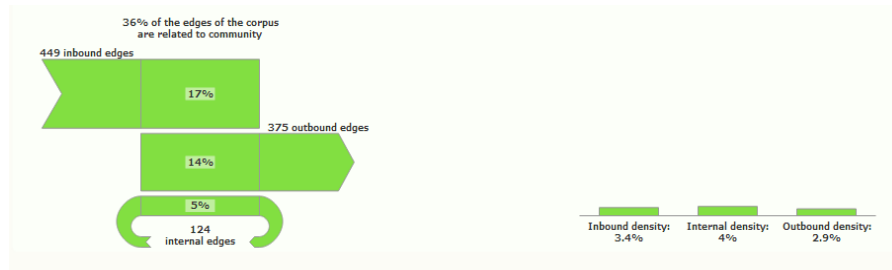
| Node name | Inbound edges FROM religion |
|---|--------------------------------|
| http://sikhnet.com/ (community) | 68 |
| http://sikhithemax.com/ (culture) | 40 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://allaboutsikhs.com/ (education) | 29 |
| http://sikhs.org/ (culture) | 29 |
| http://unitedsikhs.org/ (peace) | 21 |
| http://panthic.org/ (news) | 18 |
| http://sikhsangat.com/ (news) | 16 |
| http://sikhsangat.org/ (community) | 15 |
| http://sikh_spectrum.com/ (community) | 14 |
| http://rajkaregakhalsa.net/ (media) | 13 |

4.3.3 Sikh Corpus - Flexible Community Linkages

Figure 4.6 Sikh Corpus - Type of Activity - Community





Accounting for 19% (56 nodes) of all corpus activity, Figure 4.6 shows community websites.⁴³⁶ Compared to religion-based websites (which serve as knowledge resource hubs) moderators of community-based websites cater for the ‘diasporic interests’ of dispersed populations across countries of settlement. This means that while infused with ethno-religious grammar and Sikh-specific symbols, website content promotes more interactive engagement. Community based websites extend discussion beyond faith-based practices, and often include forum chats for audiences who want to share their localised perspectives on issues affecting Sikhs around the world.

Figure 4.7 captures the bridging capabilities of sikhnet.com, which will be discussed in more detail below. Compared to the Sikh activity map, it is clear that sikhnet.com serves as a linking hub between community and religious based corpus activity. Community based nodes are statistically dense (4%), meaning internal linkages are greater than those flowing outwards from the subset. Beyond virtual representation of the collective Sikh identity, moderators of community-based websites characteristically invite audiences to actively engage and interact with each other. We note for example that with an inbound density of 3.4% (compared to an outbound density of 2.9%), community link flows are slightly ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound). To gain a more detailed understanding of why community activities receive more inward online traffic, it is necessary to analyse activity flow linkages in greater detail.

⁴³⁶ Sikh Corpus - Type of Activity - Community. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5§ion=27&value=community>>

Figure 4.7 Sikh Corpus Community Hyperlink Flow (edges)

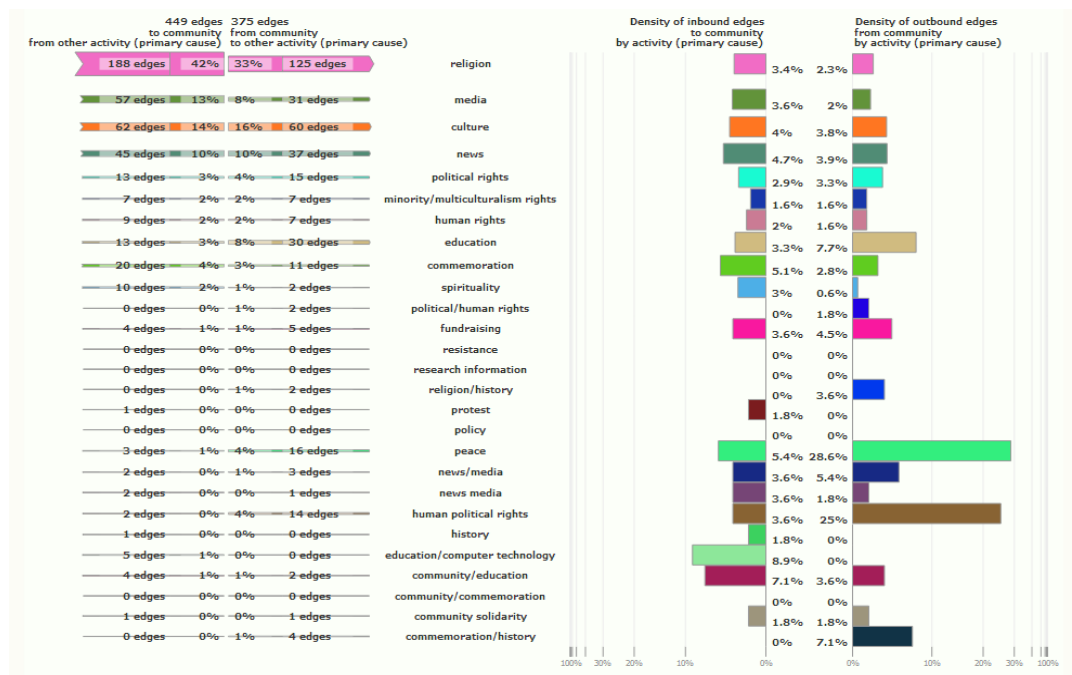


Figure 4.7 provides statistical data on the flow of community-based linkages across corpus subset activities. With a greater number of linkages flowing inward, community websites maintain an ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship with activity nodes based in religion (188 links), media (57 links), culture (62 links), news (45 links) and commemoration (20 links). This accounts for 372 inbound linkages in total, a number that is considerably greater than outbound flow linkages (264 links).

While accounting for only 19% of all corpus nodes, community nodes maintain influence online by providing an alternative network for individuals involved in diaspora politics to (re)negotiate elements of Sikh collective identity. The moderators of these websites provide basic religious resources and discuss socio-political realities impacting Sikh identity politics in various locations across countries of settlement. Interfaces are notably encased with ethno-religious grammar, but go beyond faith-based teachings or observance rituals to promote sentiments of communal attachment at the individual level. Community websites function as transnational outlets for aspects of the Sikh collective identity that benefit from interpretative reflections not as a process of memorisation or absorption but instead as a creative process of diasporic identity. This is witnessed through updates of

ethno-religious affairs and ‘Turban Politics’ which often provoke debates between youth populations, who negotiate their more flexible identities against host country backdrops.

Community websites thus imply a sense of ownership between audiences. Shared opinions and reflections are just as important as religious teachings in virtual representations of community because such articulations promote the active ownership of Sikh identity. The investigation of subset authorities confirms my own hypothesis in Chapter 2 by showing that community websites present faith in practice by focusing on the populations in countries of settlement in particular. Informed by host country socio-political realities and the ‘diasporic experience’, moderators of thelangarhall.com invite audiences to share their perspectives within and beyond the faith-based teachings of Sikhism. Langar Halls (communal kitchens) are found in every Gurdwara, and provide a vegetarian food service for all Sikh and non-Sikh visitors. Much like Langar Halls on the ground, thelangarhall.com (as suggested by its domain name), encourages progressive open-sourced reflective blogging from audiences. The website’s moderators encourage youth populations from various locales to engage in lively debates (topics include bhangra music, politics, and religious scripture).

Focusing on the transnational Sikh community, sikhchic.com⁴³⁷ similarly provides access to a diverse array of local community-based content. As visible in the website interface below, topics of discussion vary from art, cuisine and travel to the more historically significant 1947 partition and 1984 Operation Blue Star. Equally notable on the homepage interface (Figure 4.8) is the discussion of Sikh-Canadian soldiers and Remembrance Day commemorative activities in Punjab, India. The topics discussed on sikhchic.com cater to the diasporic experience, and while infused with Sikh-specific symbols, they aim to revamp the Sikh identity by interweaving different locales with issue agendas taking place in the ancestral homeland. A ‘Kids Corner’ icon on the interface, illustrates that significant efforts are placed on preserving and maintaining future public representations of the Sikh community.

⁴³⁷ “Sikh Chic – The Art and Culture of the Diaspora,” last accessed November 12, 2012.
<<http://sikhchic.com/>>

Figure 4.8 <http://sikhchic.com/>



Subgraph Authorities

(Nodes inside community that are cited by the most nodes in community)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM community |
|---|---------------------------------|
| http://sikhnet.com/ | 32 |
| http://thelangarhall.com/ | 13 |
| http://sikhchic.com/ | 12 |
| http://ensaaf.org/ | 9 |
| http://sikhpoint.com/ | 9 |
| http://sikhspectrum.com/ | 7 |

| | |
|---|---|
| http://sikhsangat.org/ | 6 |
| http://americanTurban.com/ | 4 |
| http://sikhactivist.net/ | 4 |
| http://worldsikhcouncil.org/ | 3 |

Representative Authorities

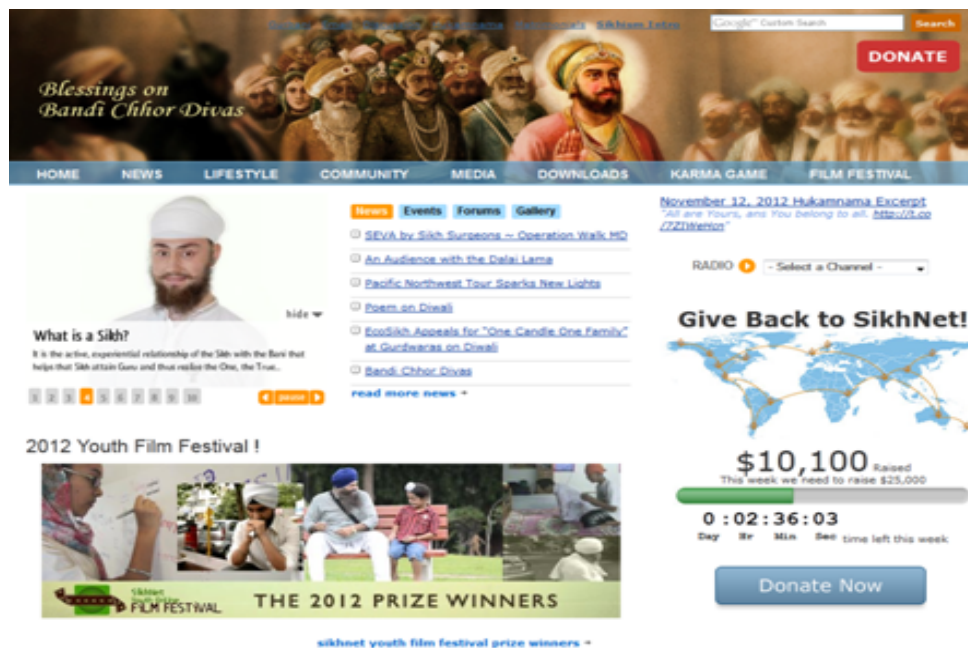
(Nodes inside community that are cited by the most nodes in other activity)

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://sikhnet.com/ | 136 |
| http://sikhchic.com/ | 41 |
| http://sikhsangat.org/ | 37 |
| http://sikhspectrum.com/ | 23 |
| http://thelangarhall.com/ | 22 |
| http://ensaaf.org/ | 20 |
| http://sikhpoint.com/ | 20 |
| http://spiritbornpeople.blogspot.com/ | 11 |
| http://sikhchannel.tv/ | 9 |
| http://sikhpioneers.org/ | 8 |

The above authority statistics highlight sikhnet.com as the primary node for community-based online activity. Neighbour exploration results only reaffirm the significance of the website across Sikh virtual space. Sikhnet.com⁴³⁸ is the most frequently cited node of the Sikh corpus. Node linkage exploration provides a visualisation of the activity reach of sikhnet.com, demonstrating that religion- and community-based relational links are most dominant.

Figure 4.9 <http://www.sikhnet.com/>

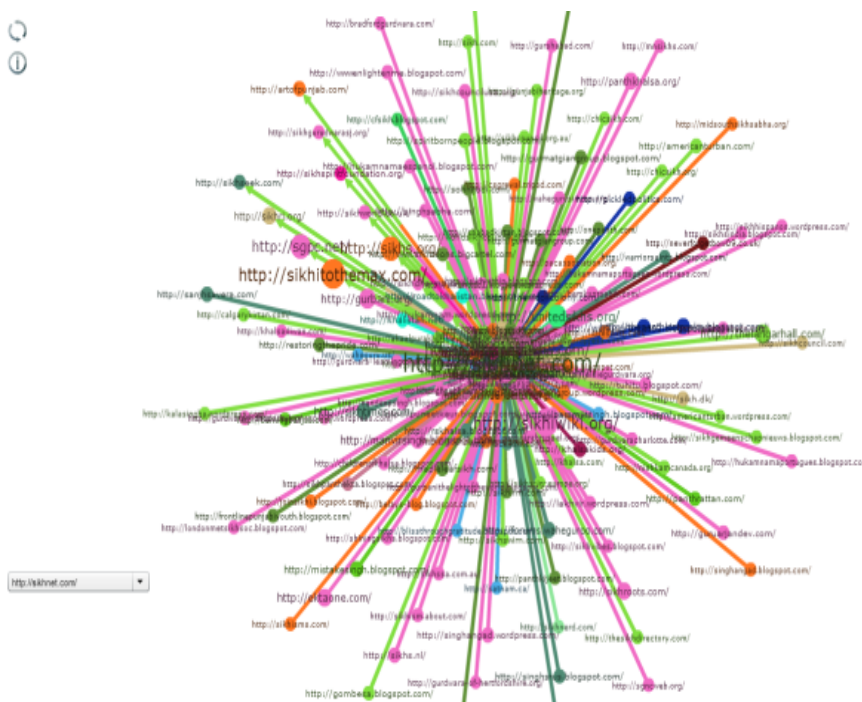


⁴³⁸ “Sharing the Sikh Experience,” last accessed November 12, 2012.
< <http://sikhnet.com/> >

Sikknet.com Neighbours⁴³⁹

| Referes <i>(Nodes that cite http://sikhnet.com/)</i> | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by http://sikhnet.com/)</i> | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://sikhnet.com/)</i> |
|---|---|---|
| 168 | 14 | 21 |

Figure 4.10 Sikhnet.com Node Linkage Exploration



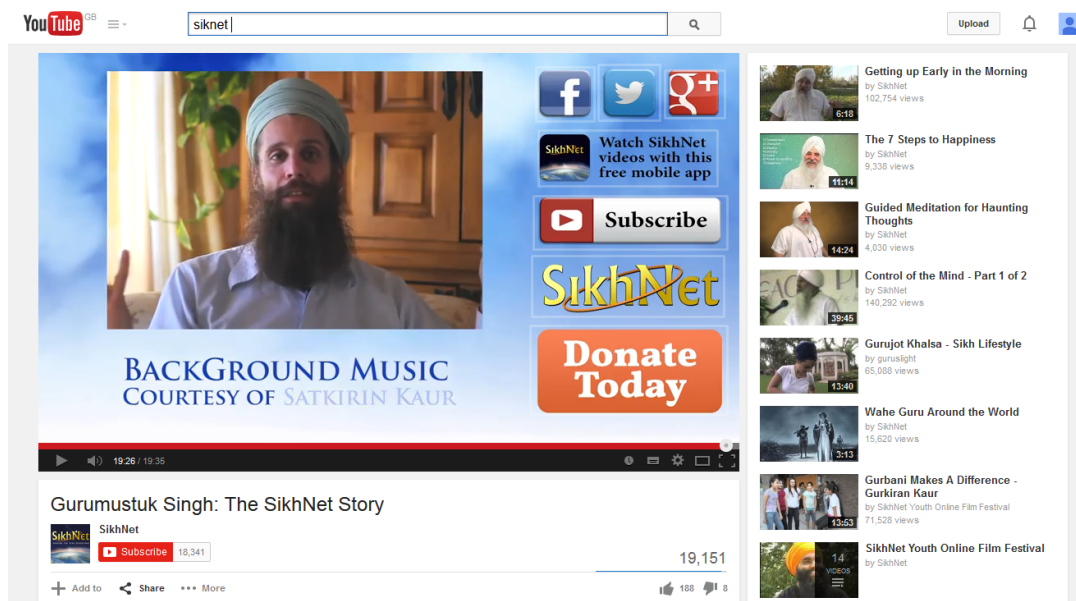
We can examine the website interface of sikhnet.com more closely to gain a better understanding of why the node maintains such significant authority in the corpus. The homepage includes images of multiple Turban-wearing Sikhs, young and old, in both historical and contemporary times. Subheadings are diverse, and focus on community affairs

⁴³⁹ Sikknet.com Corpus Node Exploration.

<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=72&map=59&node=149§ion=27>>

beyond religion (festivals play an important role). Calls to give back in the form of donations (economic resources) are most notable through reference and geographic mapping of the wider transnational community. By referencing geographic locales, moderators of sikhnet.com offer links between offline and online environments. Content is balanced in its portrayal of community, making the website an attractive node to ‘link in’ with. Interestingly, the website is maintained by a group of converts in the US, which shows the evolution of a collective identity and the flexible online identity politics that encase the Sikh diaspora. This appears to indicate that the homeland isn’t everything—that it is no longer the dominant goal of diaspora identity. Primordial bonds are instead being imagined and captured online. The creator of the Sikhnet, Gurumstak Singh (pictured below), maintains a visible presence throughout Sikh virtual space, often sharing his perspectives from the Sikhnet secondary YouTube Channel.⁴⁴⁰

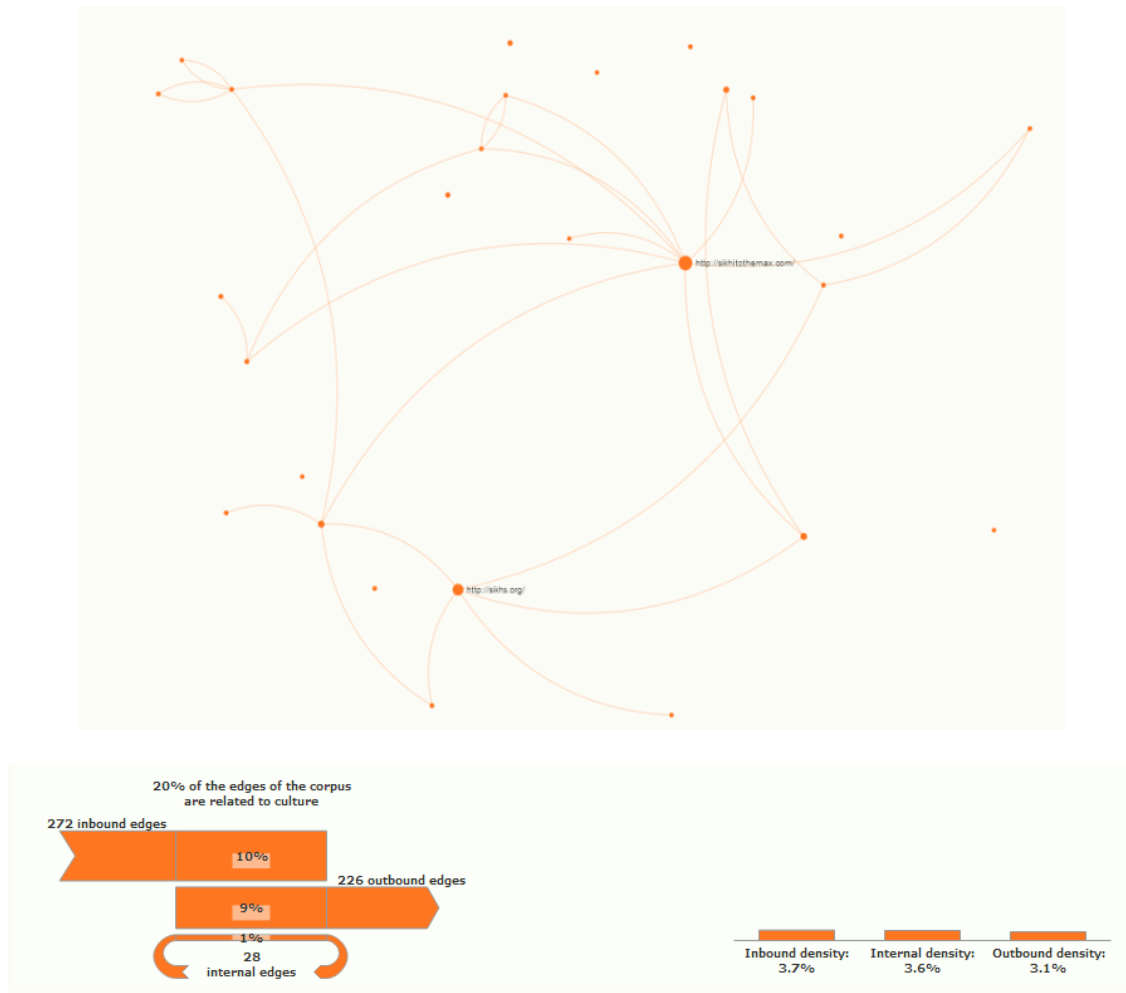
Figure 4.11 Sikhnet YouTube Channel



⁴⁴⁰ “Gurumustak Singh – The SikhNet Story,” *YouTube.com*, last accessed September 1, 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTvXYTBrtUY>>

4.3.4 Sikh Corpus - Cultural Engagement

Figure 4.12 Sikh Corpus - Type of Activity - Culture



Cultural nodes, as presented in Figure 4.12, account for 10% of all corpus activity (28 nodes).⁴⁴¹ Network linkages are spread throughout the corpus, and lack dense cluster pockets. Sikhitothemax.com is a visible authority within the subset, and if compared against the larger Sikh activity map, maintains its online presence in the centre of dense religious linkages. With an inbound density of 3.7%, cultural nodes are ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound),

⁴⁴¹ Sikh Corpus - Type of Activity - Culture.
 < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5§ion=27&value=culture> >

meaning a greater number of external activity nodes ‘link in’ to the subset. External node linkages reinforce the overall relational structure of the cultural node network.

Figure 4.13 Sikh Corpus Culture Hyperlink Flow (edges)

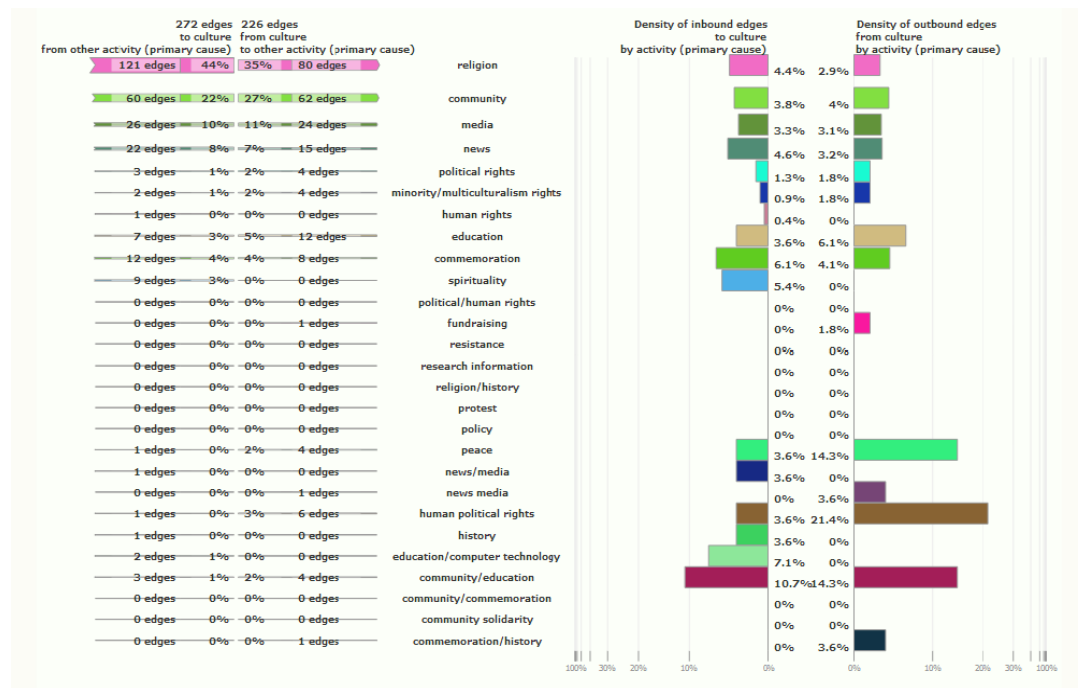


Figure 4.13 presents a more detailed account of inbound and outbound cultural node link flow. Cultural nodes appear to supplement corpus activities, focusing on ethno-religious community representation. Culture maintains an ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship with nodes focusing on religion (121 links), news (22 links), media (26 links), commemoration (12 links) and spirituality (9 links). Contributing 190 inbound links in total, the above external nodes stabilise and network cultural nodes throughout the Sikh corpus. Community- and cultural-based nodes maintain a relatively interconnected reciprocal relationship. With 60 inbound links and 62 outbound links, cultural nodes are minimally ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) to community nodes. Consideration of external authorities and hubs allows for a more detailed understanding of the flows between culture and community network linkages. As expected, cultural nodes link in to external corpus authorities such as sikhnet.com and sikhchic.com. As discussed above, the moderators of these community authorities empower perspectives from self-defined Sikhs located in countries of settlement.

Cultural activities are disseminated through community websites, which place particularly emphasis on Sikh agendas of interest on a transnational scale.

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside culture that are cited by the most nodes in culture

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM culture |
|--|-------------------------------|
| http://sikhnet.com/ (community) | 17 |
| http://sikhchic.com/ (community) | 9 |
| http://allaboutsikhs.com/ (education) | 8 |
| http://gurbani.org/ (religion) | 7 |
| http://sikhcoalition.org/ (human political rights) | 6 |
| http://sikhiwiki.org/ (religion) | 6 |
| http://akj.org/ (religion) | 5 |
| http://sikhtoons.com/ (media) | 5 |
| http://sgpc.net/ (religion) | 4 |
| http://unitedsikhs.org/ (peace) | 4 |

External Source Hubs

Nodes outside culture that cite the most nodes in culture

| Node name | Outbound edges TO culture |
|---|------------------------------|
| http://sikhiwiki.org/ (religion) | 13 |
| http://mapleleafsikh.com/ (media) | 6 |
| http://gurbani.org/ (religion) | 6 |
| http://mistakesingh.blogspot.com/ (commemoration) | 5 |
| http://thelangarhall.com/ (community) | 5 |
| http://restoringthepride.com/ (media) | 5 |
| http://thesikhdirectory.com/ (community) | 4 |
| http://satnam.ca/ (spirituality) | 4 |
| http://singhangad.wordpress.com/ (religion) | 4 |
| http://sikhism.about.com/ (religion) | 4 |

External source hubs emphasise the fact that between community and culture, linkages advance the online representation of collective identity expressed by self-defined participant members. Thelangarhall.com and thesikhdirectory.com encourage audiences to engage and interact with like-minded individuals across online and offline environments. In the case of thelangarhall.com, references to cultural customs and locally held events entice and mobilise audience interactions. Thesikhdirectory.com disseminates a community (business) directory of cultural events held at local Gurdwaras throughout the UK. The organiser has also created the “World Sikh Awards”, an annual ceremony celebrating Sikh excellence across the

globe.⁴⁴² From this, we can understand how cultural activities promote gathering and weave into larger community engagements to maintain a transnationally scaled presence.

Apart from community, cultural nodes maintain notable ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relationships with political rights (4 links), minority/ multiculturalism rights (4 links), and education (12 links) based nodes. As indicated by the cultural edges density chart, the node subsets above collectively account for 82 outbound linkages. Experiences on the ground across countries of settlement often provide the impetus for local gatherings and more large-scale coordinated mobilisations. This includes engagements focused on informing and educating audiences on Sikh religious and cultural customs. Cultural events are indeed ethno-religiously specific, but are interwoven with ‘rights-based’ frames as a way to legitimise calls for more widespread mobilisation. Cultural nodes, while accounting for only 10% of corpus nodes, provide audiences with considerable access to Sikh infused identity-based networks that connect online and offline environments.

Subgraph and representative authorities highlight the fact that beyond religious observance, cultural nodes encourage active engagements more locally. This includes access to Punjabi language institutions (sikhfoundation.org), Sikh youth camps (boss-uk.org) and art exhibitions (artofpunjab.com). We also note the extensive representation of blog interfaces (Tumblr, Wordpress, Blogspot), which characteristically encourage more informal, personalised and reflective conversations grounded in specific localities by small-scale actors.

Subgraph Authorities

(Nodes inside culture that are cited by the most nodes in culture)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM culture |
|---|-------------------------------|
| http://sikhitothemax.com/ | 9 |

⁴⁴² “Sikh Awards – Inspiring and Encouraging Generations Around the World,” last accessed November 2, 2012. <<http://www.sikhawards.com/>>

| | |
|---|---|
| http://sikhs.org/ | 5 |
| http://sikhfoundation.org/ | 3 |
| http://sikhisms.com/ | 2 |
| http://spcolor.tumblr.com/ | 2 |
| http://sikhspeak.com/ | 2 |
| http://vikramkhalsa.com/ | 1 |
| http://sikhpulse.wordpress.com/ | 1 |
| http://wearesikhs.tumblr.com/ | 1 |
| http://joinsikhi.blogspot.com/ | 1 |

Representative Authorities

(Nodes inside culture that are cited by the most nodes in other activity)

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://sikhitothemax.com/ | 88 |
| http://sikhs.org/ | 63 |
| http://boss-uk.org/ | 24 |
| http://sikhfoundation.org/ | 20 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://sikhspeak.com/ | 14 |
| http://artofpunjab.com/ | 10 |
| http://gurmatgiangroup.wordpress.com/ | 8 |
| http://sikhpulse.wordpress.com/ | 6 |
| http://sikhbookclub.wordpress.com/ | 4 |
| http://vikramkhalsa.com/ | 4 |

Representative authority statistics confirm the centrality of sikhithemax.com, the second most frequently cited node in the Sikh corpus. The website interface uses a variety of community-specific subheadings and symbolic graphical illustrations. This includes religious symbols (Khanda), articles of faith (Kirpan), and musical instruments native to Punjab (tabla). Moderators complement ethno-religious illustrations with graphics widely recognised in global popular culture (the Superman emblem, racing flag and the globe). Moderators of Sikhithemax.com provide considerable access to Keertan and Gurbani (religious hymns of worship) activities as well as language training. As a cultural resource, website moderators invite audiences to test their Sikh knowledge by playing “Who wants to be a Supersant?” Although sikhithemax.com does not update on a daily basis, the website maintains corpus authority by reminding audiences of its stability as an online resource. Reliability and authority are linked to longevity, as can be seen at the centre of the homepage reading, “[d]eveloped in Aug 2000, the first Internet Gurbani Search Engine developed for the Cyber Sangat!!” The online history of sikhithemax.com implies a virtual permanence that has led to the snowballing of linkages over time, expressing the long-stay archival aspects of the web. Neighbour statistics highlight the resulting disproportionate flow of inbound linkages (97), with sikhithemax.com⁴⁴³ citing just one node in the entire corpus (sikhnet.com). Node

⁴⁴³ “Sikhi to the Max – Enabling Gurmat Knowledge,” last accessed November 2, 2012.
<<http://sikhithemax.com/>>

linkage exploration provides a more detailed visualisation of the diverse activities in which sikhithothemax.com engages (religion, community, media, education, spirituality).

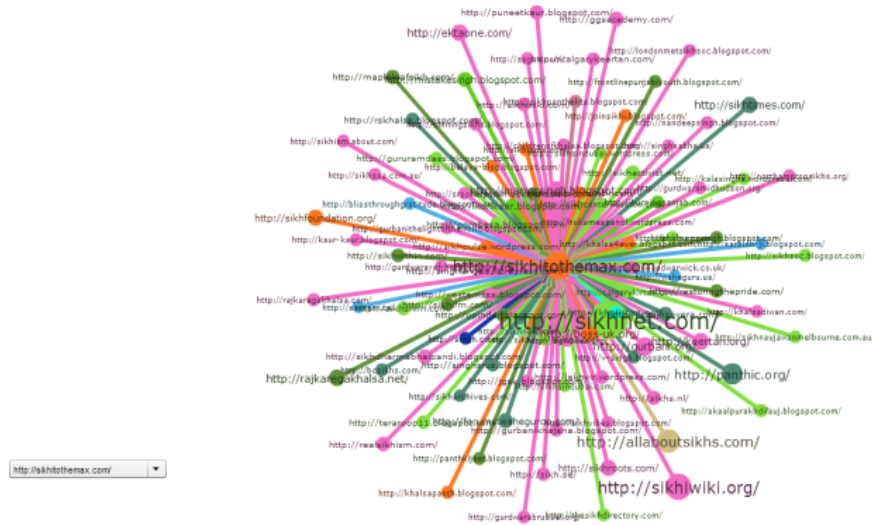
Figure 4.14 <http://sikhithothemax.com/>



Sikhithothemax.com Neighbours⁴⁴⁴

| Referees (Nodes that cite http://sikhithothemax.com/) | Mutually linked neighbours (Nodes that cite and are cited by http://sikhithothemax.com/) | Cited (Nodes that are cited by http://sikhithothemax.com/) |
|---|--|--|
| 97 | 1 | 1 |

⁴⁴⁴ Sikhithothemax.com Corpus Node Exploration.
<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=72&map=59&node=28§ion=27>>



The above findings present a snapshot of the Sikh virtual activity network that cannot be captured by traditional theoretical and methodological approaches to diaspora politics. Beyond node linkages, we must also bear in mind that Internet web 2.0 online platforms promote a variety of read-write formats, all of which are user-centred and collaborative. Beyond the descriptive element, it shows that the online community represents an important arena for new forms of diaspora politics. Particular emphasis was placed on deciphering corpus nodes between conventional websites (characterised by thematic focus and splash style imagery) and blogs (expressive web logs mimicking personal journals). Blogs provide ordinary people with a relatively open platform to tinker and toy with their own identities. This form of public brainstorming is often informed by the social fabric and daily occurrences experienced locally. In addition to activity, corpus nodes were also classified by website type⁴⁴⁵ to help gain a more accurate picture of the Sikh blogosphere. As discussed in the methodology portion of this study, due to anonymity, blogs were largely identified through domain names. Common blog interfaces include Wordpress, Blogspot and Tumblr (all of which appear in the node domain name).

⁴⁴⁵ Nodes were classified by type of website, actor, activity, secondary activity, language, location. Type of website classifications: site, blog, news group, forum site, social network.

Figure 4.16 below presents the Sikh corpus as classified by website type.⁴⁴⁶ We note the cluster of blogs on the top right of the corpus, which if compared against the Sikh activity map, appears to maintain internally dense linkages. The Sikh blogosphere is further isolated below, and is visibly well networked on the top right of the corpus. Based on corpus statistics, blogs account for some 36% (104 blogs) of all website nodes.⁴⁴⁷ With 46% of all corpus linkages connecting to blogs, the Sikh blogosphere is well connected to external corpus websites. Flows of information and discussion push outward, which is characteristic of most blogospheres. That is to say, blogs usually source a wide variety of external websites in their ongoing user-generated commentary. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the ability to communicate is part of the expressive practice of performing diaspora politics, and the virtual world now appears the best place to do this. Corpus statistics confirm this, as a disproportionate number of links source outwards (708 outbound linkages).

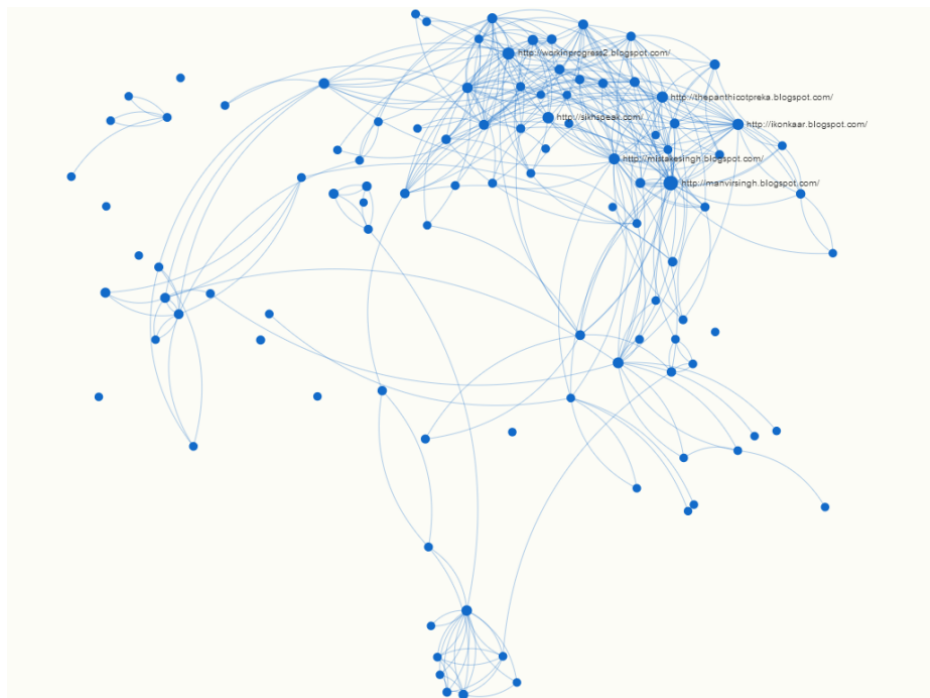
⁴⁴⁶ Sikh Corpus - Type of Website. <[http://maps.e-](http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27)

[diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27](http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27)>
⁴⁴⁷ Conventional websites (characterised by thematic focus and splash style imagery) account for 60% of nodes, with news groups and forum sites accounting for 3% and 1% of nodes respectively.

Sikh Corpus - Type of Website - Blog.

<[http://maps.e-](http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27&value=blog)
[diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27&value=blog](http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27&value=blog)>

Figure 4.16 Sikh Corpus - Type of Website - Blog



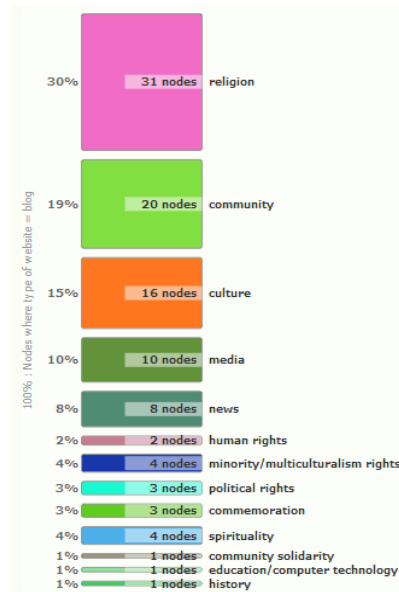


Figure 4.17 Sikh Corpus Blog Statistics

Statistical data from the Sikh corpus indicates that out of 104 nodes, the majority of Sikh blogs focus on issue agendas related to religion (30%, 31 nodes), community (19%, 20 nodes) and culture (15%, 16 nodes).

For actors claiming to represent the interests of the Sikh diaspora, themes of religion, community and culture are tightly intertwined and topically interwoven. In the Sikh blogosphere, this often translates into a standardised use of ‘ethno-religious grammar’. While blogs may not carry authority status online, blogging websites help bridge Sikh-specific activity network clusters. Corpus statistics highlight the fact that many blogs serve as horizontal online bridges, capable of fostering connections between various activity subsets. As indicated by their domain names (Wordpress, Blogspot, Tumblr), many of the top religious, community and cultural diffusing hubs are blogs, which in practice are fairly easy

and cost-effective to maintain. Each of the blog⁴⁴⁸ interfaces presented below, visibly employ ethno-religious grammar (Sangat, Punjabi language) and Sikh-specific symbols (Turban wearing Sikhs, temples, articles of faith) in their interface headers.

Diffusing Hubs

(Nodes inside religion that cite the most nodes in other activity) (*primary cause*)

| Node name | Outbound edges TO other activity (primary cause) |
|---|--|
| http://sikhiwiki.org/ | 79 |
| http://esikhs.com/ | 29 |
| http://sikhiwiki.com/ | 23 |
| http://lakhvir.wordpress.com/ | 22 |
| http://nandeepsingh.blogspot.com/ | 21 |
| http://gurbani.org/ | 19 |
| http://singhangad.wordpress.com/ | 17 |
| http://tuhitu.blogspot.com/ | 17 |
| http://manvirsingh.blogspot.com/ | 14 |
| http://usingh.blogspot.com/ | 12 |

⁴⁴⁸ “Manvir Singh,” (Blog), last accessed November 2, 2012.

<<http://manvirsingh.blogspot.co.uk/>>

“London and Home Counties Sikh Societies,” (Blog), last accessed November 2, 2012.

<<http://sikhsoc.blogspot.co.uk/>>

“Sikh Pulse,” (Blog), last accessed May 7, 2014.

<<http://sikhpulse.wordpress.com>>

Figure 4.18 <http://manvirsingh.blogspot.co.uk/>



Diffusing Hubs

(Nodes inside community that cite the most nodes in other activity)

(primary cause)

| Node name | Outbound edges TO other activity (primary cause) |
|---|--|
| http://thelangarhall.com/ | 30 |
| http://worldsikhcouncil.org/ | 26 |
| http://thesikhdirectory.com/ | 24 |
| http://khalsa.com/ | 21 |
| http://sikhnet.com/ | 18 |
| http://sikhsoc.blogspot.com/ | 14 |
| http://akaalpurakhdifauj.blogspot.com/ | 14 |
| http://gururamdass.blogspot.com/ | 13 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://teraroop11.blogspot.com/ | 12 |
| http://punjabih heritage.org/ | 12 |

Figure 4.19 <http://sikhsoc.blogspot.co.uk/>



Diffusing Hubs

(Nodes inside culture that cite the most nodes in other activity)

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM culture |
|---|-------------------------------|
| http://boss-uk.org/ | 36 |
| http://vikramkhalsa.com/ | 20 |
| http://sikhpulse.wordpress.com/ | 18 |
| http://singhangad.blogspot.com/ | 17 |
| http://pacassociation.org/ | 16 |
| http://sikhfoundation.org/ | 15 |
| http://sikhbookclub.wordpress.com/ | 12 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://belays-blog.blogspot.com/ | 11 |
| http://sangatdeseva.blogspot.com/ | 11 |

Figure 4.20 <http://sikhpulse.wordpress.com/>



sikh.p.u.l.s.e.

never losing rhythm. always to the beat.

The nodes shown above are sequentially ranked based on the greatest number of outbound external linkages within religion, community and culture based activity subsets. Within each of these key corpus activities, blogs do indeed lack representational authority. Not one of the top ten Sikh corpus authorities presented at the beginning of this section was identified as a blog. However, when considering the external outbound linkages outlined above, it is clear that blogs play a very important role both in connecting nodes and disseminating content throughout the corpus. At the bloggers discretion, nodes can also link in to external websites that may not have anything to do with Sikh identity or diaspora politics.

As a key diffusing hub, thelangarhall.com links outwards and provides an open forum for ordinary people to express their opinions on timely issues of interest. Forum topics vary and extend beyond the Sikh faith to reflect the realities experienced by contributors, which may or may not include active (re)negotiations of collective identity. With moderators inviting audiences to produce and engage in debate, thelangarhall.com pushes for a more porous and flexible understanding of the collective Sikh identity. As argued in Chapter 2, blogs are evidence that instead of being statically bound to the ancestral homeland, online representations of diaspora identity politics are in a constant state of flux, and are increasingly being shaped from the bottom up. This underscores the need for a more in-

depth consideration of the common narratives and issue agendas linking online representations of Sikh diaspora politics.

4.5 Contextualising Sikh Identity in Virtual Space

In this section, I discuss the prominent themes represented in contemporary Sikh identity politics through the results obtained through web-based content analysis.⁴⁴⁹ Informed by sample corpus nodes (40 websites), web-based content analysis provides a more communicative and aggregated understanding of the common narratives that make up online Sikh diaspora politics. The results show that notions of collective identity are mobilised and immersed in specific ethno-religious grammar (including symbols, cultural references and historical events), are far more complex than the simple identity-territory duality of essentialist approaches.

Frequently employed words in the Sikh Corpus

| | |
|--------------|------|
| Sikh | 1834 |
| Guru | 928 |
| God | 317 |
| Religion | 159 |
| Spiritual | 144 |
| Turban | 78 |
| Faith | 75 |
| Human rights | 72 |
| 1984 | 69 |

⁴⁴⁹ See Appendix B: Content Analysis Results.

| | |
|----------|----|
| Humanity | 64 |
| Youth | 55 |



Figure 4.21 Common Words Found in the Sikh Corpus

The web-based content analysis shows that online narratives primarily cluster around themes of religious practice, articles of faith and cultural identity that are meant to bind different forms of Sikh consciousness together.⁴⁵⁰ Building off Gurdwara institutions, cyberspace functions as an accessible ethno-religious resource hub or open platform to support activities of community representation and cultural reproduction across the globe.

As a mobilising structure, the web provides a connective opportunity for actors and audiences to organise and coordinate local calls for action on the ground. Results indicate a more progressive representation of contemporary *Sikhi*, which I contend caters to younger populations or marginalised actors who may not maintain the same authority as the more hierarchical Gurdwara institutions. Sentiments of unity and collective identity, while streamlined through faith, are malleable and invite audiences to reflect, (re)negotiate and express aspects of their own identity without necessarily being contained to a nation-state. This includes breaking the silence around cultural taboos and socio-political realities which, while intimidating to discuss in public, threaten the future of the Sikh identity.

⁴⁵⁰ See Appendix B: Content Analysis Results.

Articulations of Sikh grievances (re)frame elements of collective identity through a wider ‘rights-based’ discourse linking local populations to a more globally dispersed Sikh advocacy network. Web-based content analysis, for example, reveals significant reference to the injustice of 1984, a defining moment in contemporary Sikh history. Online network engagements infused with human rights language also reflect the current hurdles many Sikh youth face when choosing to actively practice their faith (key words: Turban, human rights, youth). As suggested in the framework Chapters 1–3, issue agendas are more likely to become a part of global politics when contextualised through appeals for social (not just Sikh) justice and political ‘rights-based’ claims. Online actors legitimise the relevancy and veracity of community grievances by decentralising host country political opportunity structures (legal frameworks of universal human rights).

As supported by respondent interviews, online (identity, interest, activity) networks are more likely to spill over into the ‘real world’ when efforts are made to engage with increasingly diverse sets of actors. This includes individuals who maintain a comparatively strong footing in local Gurdwara institutions. Indicative of demographic realities of the digital age, online content largely caters to the post-84 generation (second and third generation Punjabi-Sikhs). For this reason especially, the web is regarded as a supplementary platform for Sikh empowerment and identity preservation. In the Sikh case, the online environment functions as a transnational repository or archive for Sikh knowledge and information, which I argue is incredibly useful in coordinating and facilitating the processes of mobilisation. The final section of this chapter presents reflections from key informants to better contextualise online Sikh representations and the virtual strategies that are weaving Sikh diaspora politics into world affairs from the ‘bottom up’.

4.6 Actor Reflections: Preserving the Sikh Identity Through Virtual Engagement

4.6.1 The Web as a New Platform for Collective Identity

Online representations of Sikh identity reinforce sentiments of communal attachment not only towards the ancestral homeland, but also towards a shared sense of belonging between globally dispersed participant members. Highlighting the archival properties of the web, an activist involved in moderating content on The Langar Hall explained the forum as “an online documentation of the Punjabi Sikh community, with a certain emphasis on the

diasporic community.”⁴⁵¹ Online representations of Sikh collective identity, while varied, link and reinforce the symbolic authority of community religious institutions. Evoking a sense of familiarity for example, *Langar* refers to the Gurdwara’s communal kitchen, which serves food to all temple visitors. Contextualising the Langar Hall’s web presence, the same forum moderator explained:

“...for many of us growing up in the Sikh community and our local spaces, the Gurdwara, specifically the Langar Hall, is where you came to talk, gossip...[and discuss anything from] politics...[to] Power Rangers and Transformers...whatever you wanted to talk about, so we tried to create an online forum where you can talk about anything...”⁴⁵²

Lacking the hierarchical structure characteristic of Gurdwara institutions, cyberspace offers a far more horizontal, levelled playing field between actors and audiences. The web also encourages comparatively open-ended exploratory engagements from individuals. According to the same moderator, forums like The Langar Hall provide a hub for dispersed populations to share aspects of their identity with limited scrutiny:

“...people in the community have a space...they can explore their spirituality in a non-judgemental space. They can physically look whatever way they want to...eat, drink, whatever they feel like...they will always have a place [in the Langar Hall] where they will be accepted as Sikhs...”⁴⁵³

Interpretations of *Sikhi* vary amongst diasporic youth, who often maintain a more flexible attachments to their faith, countries of settlement and ancestral homeland than their elders. With a sense of ownership, online platforms empower audiences with the ability to (re)discover their Sikh identity without judgement. The ability to add personal reflections to

⁴⁵¹ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁴⁵² Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁴⁵³ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

virtual engagements reaffirms the communicative capabilities of web connectivity—a point that is only captured through the use of Big Data. While online engagements contribute to the web presence of Sikh identity politics, they also foster dynamic connections between dispersed populations on the ground. Prominent Sikh blogger American Turban clarifies, “[the web] has allowed us to connect across our diaspora and to our land of origin.”⁴⁵⁴ Built on linked contributions, the conceptual boundaries of Sikh virtual space extend well beyond the confines of the nation-state container or the local Gurdwara. According to American Turban, contemporary populations find much utility in the boundless non-linear nature of the web. He explains, “it’s [the web] allowed us to discuss, debate, discover and learn...[and] engage in topics that we have not yet been able to so openly in our Gurdwaras and community settings.”⁴⁵⁵

Members of the Sikh community who contribute and share their perspectives online also play a role in shaping network content. That being said, actors involved in Sikh identity politics remain adamant that in order for online engagements to have a ‘real’ effect, they must translate to the real world. We must be mindful that as a mobilising structure, the Gurdwara has long served as the authority for community engagement, identity exploration and socio-cultural affairs. Online Sikh formations for this reason often vie to legitimise the relevancy of their engagements through an active presence offline.

Recognising the importance of local engagement, the creator of the UK based Sikh Directory explained “it’s Vaisakhi now [annual festival]...everywhere up and down the UK we have Kirtans [organised worship]...I go to all of them, every Saturday, Sunday.”⁴⁵⁶ The Sikh Directory facilitates connections and is “more about promoting what the community is doing” in terms of business enterprise.⁴⁵⁷ Soft (virtual) and hard copies of the directory notably include an information section describing key religious practices and cultural events specific to the Sikh community. Although initially set up to promote Sikh enterprise strictly, the creator explained, “the community came back to me saying, can you add some

⁴⁵⁴ Author interview with American Turban on 12 July 2012, California, USA (via email).

He comments: “there is a lot more open discussion about topics online than there is on the ground. You see many more discussions about subjects that we don’t often talk about openly in our community”.

⁴⁵⁵ Author interview with American Turban on 12 July 2012, California, USA (via email).

⁴⁵⁶ Author interview with Sikh Directory member on 15 March 2012, London, UK.

⁴⁵⁷ Author interview with Sikh Directory member on 15 March 2012, London, UK.

information [on Sikhism].”⁴⁵⁸ In disseminating elements of collective identity, the directory’s creator further clarified, “the idea is that you learn something...whether a 70-year-old lady or her 17 year old grandson...everybody in the household will find something useful in it.”⁴⁵⁹ Anyone in the UK can order the directory free of charge online, highlighting the importance of accessibility in promoting unity between local community members.

Similarly, a member of the Toronto based Sikh Activist Network (SAN) emphasised the underlying importance of local community engagements in strengthening collective identity representation. “We work with every Gurdwara, and I think that’s been great, learning to build these bridges...the different older organisations that exist...hearing their stories.”⁴⁶⁰ While progressive in their approach, these actors expressed much reverence towards not only the overall authority of the Gurdwara, but also the past experiences of local community elders. Past and present threats to the Sikh identity continue to serve as a source of unity between dispersed community members. Through their online engagements, actors seek to inform and educate audiences about unresolved group traumas—most commonly associated with the tragic events of 1984. Grievances remain rooted in the lack of international recognition and justice for the survivors and families affected by the attacks. Activities commemorating 1984 run in tandem with present-day advocacy, which in the post 9/11 security environment focus on ‘Turban Politics’ in countries of settlement.

4.6.2 Contemporary Advocacy: Reframing Grievance Narratives Online

By articulating grievance claims via social justice and political rights, contemporary Sikh advocacy networks have increasingly gained the capabilities to extend their ‘reach’ beyond ethno-religious lines. Actors vie to legitimise the relevancy of their claims by catering to the socio-political fabric of the host country through the master frame of human rights. This often includes applying universal rights and democratic freedoms to community injustices. SAN, “A Youth Movement for Peace, Love and Justice”, for example, frames much of its online presence through ‘rights-based’ discourse.⁴⁶¹ It should be noted that online advocacy represents only a small portion of the network’s overall activity. In contextualising their on-

⁴⁵⁸ Author interview with Sikh Directory member on 15 March 2012, London, UK.

⁴⁵⁹ Author interview with Sikh Directory member on 15 March 2012, London, UK.

⁴⁶⁰ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁶¹ “Sikh Activist Network – A Youth Movement for Peace, Love and Justice,” last accessed November 2, 2012. <<http://sikhactivist.net/>>

the-ground engagements, the SAN member I interviewed explained the network's primary focus as "empowerment of the local community, through a three pronged approach [of] services, events, and advocacy."⁴⁶² Treating the web as platform for mobilisation as opposed to simply representation, the member clarified, "you've got to follow up with action in the real-world...politicians, community members...it doesn't equate to anything if it's not tangible."⁴⁶³ As indicated by research findings, many actors are keen to embrace the supportive and enabling functions of cyberspace but remain relatively sceptical about the platform's real-world influential capabilities. This position was supported by the forum moderator of 'The Langar Hall', who said "you can have a strong network [online], but the ground matters most in reality."⁴⁶⁴

While the web does indeed provide a connective opportunity for actors to communicate diasporic perspectives, virtual Sikh formations do not always transfer to the ground. As an alternative platform for community representation, the web functions as a decentralised network for members to congregate, discuss and mobilise. The corpus mapping, with the help of Big Data, help highlight this alternative. These actors primarily 'link in' to cyberspace in an effort to more readily educate populations of the various issues affecting the greater transnational community. Recognising the growing presence of Sikh advocacy online, the moderator of 'The Langar Hall' forum explained, "we're doing it [community engagement] more openly than our parents did, partially because we're aware of more resources in the diaspora."⁴⁶⁵

Informed by host country socio-political realities, progressive youth actors frame their advocacy through democratic principles (freedom, equality, justice). Appeals for justice are directed at domestic and international governing bodies, and are pinned to universal principles of human rights in an effort to legitimise community grievances as important global issues more publicly. In framing the injustices of 1984 for example, a member of SAN was quick to clarify that in their advocacy, "everything is sourced from Amnesty."⁴⁶⁶ Cognisant of transnational applicability, the activist explained "we [SAN] were like "this is not going to be based on opinions, it's going to be [about the] facts! So when we *do* argue

⁴⁶² Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁶³ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁶⁴ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁴⁶⁵ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁴⁶⁶ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

it's not going to be based solely on opinion.”⁴⁶⁷ By referencing non-governmental organisations like Amnesty International, actors vie to simultaneously preserve the salience of past traumas and link their claims to world affairs.

The violence and injustice of 1984 is a common theme throughout many of the ongoing events organised by SAN. ‘Tears and Ashes’, for example is an event devoted entirely to commemorating 1984, and is primarily directed towards Sikh youth who did not witness the historical moment first-hand. Young people are invited to learn, discuss and commemorate the violence experienced by Sikhs in Punjab following the desecration of the Golden Temple. The event showcases 1984 artwork, poetry and musical performances from local (Toronto based) community members. Scenes of violence are re-enacted by performers who in their portrayals as victims, don ripped clothing and use fake blood. Fact-based informative presentations are complemented with testimonials from survivors, who recount the trauma they endured at the hands of the Indian Army. Public figures are also invited to speak and attend the event as a way to show their support for the Sikh community in Canada. Notable speakers from the 2011 ‘Tears and Ashes’⁴⁶⁸ event included Sharmila Seteram, Director of Amnesty International Canada, Dr. Harinder Singh of the Sikh Research Institute, and former Federal NDP MP Olivia Chow.⁴⁶⁹



Figure 4.22 SAN ‘Tears to Ashes’ Poster Campaign

⁴⁶⁷ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁶⁸ “SAN – Tears to Ashes,” *Sikh Activist Network*, last accessed July 1, 2014.

<<http://sikhactivist.net/tears-and-ashes-announcement/>>

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

A less sombre event, ‘When Lions Roar’ was first organised in 2009 as a way to foster discussion and build a sense of community between post-1984 Sikhs. Themes of social justice and youth empowerment are addressed at this annual event through lively hip-hop performances, poetry, Gatka (Sikh Martial Arts), Tanti Saaj (classical instrument), graffiti and visual art. In response to its growing popularity, SAN expanded the event to a full week festival in 2013. Organisers thanked the Sikh community for their continued support on the website, adding “this ‘When Lions Roar Festival’ stands as testament to our unbroken spirit, that despite the June 1984 Genocide, we still stand tall and strong.”⁴⁷⁰

Online platforms have been essential to both the organisation and coordination of ‘When Lions Roar’. Virtual outreach campaigns focus on disseminating calls for submissions and volunteers throughout Sikh virtual space. The Langar Hall and blogger Maple Leaf Sikh have played important roles in promoting the event to audiences accessing their website.⁴⁷¹ Festival updates are posted to the SAN Facebook page and followers are also sent an online invitation to pin to their social media event calendars. One of the more notable events of the festival is the 1984 Seminar, a youth conference where public figures, human rights lawyers and community advocates share their perspectives on the Golden Temple attack. Panel discussions focus on the lasting impact of 1984 on the Sikh psyche, and current appeals for international recognition and justice.

⁴⁷⁰ “SAN – When Lions Roar,” *Sikh Activist Network*, last accessed July 1, 2014.

<<http://sikhactivist.net/wlr-fest/>>

⁴⁷¹ “When Lions Roar Concert Bloodstained,” *Maple Leaf Sikh* (Blog), last accessed June 1, 2014.

< <http://www.mapleleafsikh.com/2013/06/when-lions-roar-concert-bloodstained.html>>

“What Happens When Lions Roar,” *The Langar Hall*, last accessed June 1, 2014.

<<http://thelangarhall.com/canada/what-happens-when-lions-roar/>>

Figure 4.23 When Lions Roar Festival 2013
Call for Submissions⁴⁷²



*widely disseminated throughout Sikh virtual space

Figure 4.24 When Lions Roar Festival
Facebook Event Page⁴⁷³



⁴⁷² "SAN – When Lions Roar Festival," *Sikh Activist Network*, last accessed June 1, 2014.

<<http://sikhactivist.net/the-when-lions-roar-festival/>>

⁴⁷³ Sikh Activist Network Facebook page, last accessed June 1, 2014.

<<https://www.facebook.com/events/386555711462836/>> Sudda Haq (Our Right) is a 2013 Punjabi film, based on the tumultuous period of conflict in Punjab during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Figure 4.25 When Lions Roar Festival, May 21, 2013 - June 8, 2013⁴⁷⁴



Emphasising the importance of historical memory in shaping Sikh identity politics, blogger American Turban contextualised contemporary advocacy, saying:

“The Sikh community has a long memory, and we [Sikhs] connect to our distant past often —stories of our persecution and our dedication to our identity are very commonly expressed and represented.”⁴⁷⁵

Reflections from respondents I interviewed confirm the usefulness of the web as a source for both identity (re)discovery and empowerment from the bottom up. Actors also highlight the importance of surrounding socio-political realities in shaping Sikh diaspora politics between the online and offline environment. As noted by the moderator of The Langar Hall, “the particular relationship with a diaspora community [and] the state plays an important role—not the biggest, but it does play a role in shaping some sort of consciousness.”⁴⁷⁶ Actors structure their grievance claims in the context of the political principles of countries of settlement, suggesting that narratives of trauma are intrinsically informed by geographic location. Recognising the influential role of democratic social fabrics, Canadian based blogger Maple Leaf Sikh commented, “this country, [Canada] and the principles of

⁴⁷⁴ “SAN – When Lions Roar Festival,” *Sikh Activist Network*.

⁴⁷⁵ Author interview with American Turban on 12 July 2012, California, USA (via email).

⁴⁷⁶ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

multiculturalism post 1980s has become ingrained in much of the goals and standpoints we [the Sikh community] have.”⁴⁷⁷

Past struggles and narratives of perseverance are indeed well entrenched within contemporary representations of Sikh collective identity. Grievances associated with 1984 promote cohesion and serve as a source of collective unity between dispersed youth populations in particular. “Today the diaspora is upholding certain parts of the narrative [allegations of genocide] from the past”, affirms Maple Leaf Sikh.⁴⁷⁸ By using the web to fill knowledge gaps between generations, online actors invite fellow community members to actively (re)awaken and (re)negotiate their attachment and commitment to the transnational Sikh community. Indicative of generational shifts, demands for international accountability and justice are supported by increasingly liquid traumatic memories. That is, in propelling grievance narratives forward, contemporary Sikh formations build upon both experienced *and* imagined traumas. With the 1984 desecration of the Golden Temple serving as the focal point of contemporary grievance narratives, youth actors maintain an online association with the violence experienced in Punjab during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Reinforcing symbolic loyalties to the ancestral homeland, blogger American Turban acknowledged the flexible appropriation of such traumatic memories, commenting:

“It surprises me how many young Sikhs are aware and passionate about Sikh grievances in India during the 1980s, even when they themselves were only toddlers at that time. Some were not born during those tumultuous times, and not even born in India, and yet they are still passionate about what happened to Sikhs and the Sikh identity during that decade.”⁴⁷⁹

In their advocacy, diaspora youth actors assume a sense of ownership over past communal traumas. Memories associated with June 1984 coalesce online to maintain a significant presence throughout contemporary Sikh narratives. Actors vie to steer diasporic perceptions towards coordinated action by framing the atrocities of 1984 not only as a

⁴⁷⁷ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁷⁸ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁷⁹ Author interview with American Turban on 12 July 2012, California, USA (via email).

symbolic memory but also as a fundamental violation of human rights that deserves more attention from the international community. As noted by the Langar Hall moderator, “people [diasporic actors] that are actually talking about these sort of human rights violations [persecution during the 1980s], they’re really hoping for justice, they’re not doing it to keep only a memory alive.”⁴⁸⁰

The evidence here suggests that as a dynamic non-linear platform of engagement, the web offers an accessible network for dispersed members to publicly address community grievances on a transnational scale. Youth actors in particular find much utility in the outreach capabilities of the web, which lack the top-down hierarchical power structures characteristic of Gurdwara institutions. With limited barriers of inclusion, even the most marginalised of actors are able to contribute alternative perspectives to deep-seated Sikh grievances online. Sikh virtual space therefore provides a networked opportunity for actors to (re)negotiate and (re)shape grievance narratives to better fit with contemporary host country realities. Propelling grievance claims forward, actors also strive to disentangle the injustices of 1984 from the mainstream media’s violent portrayal of the now defunct Khalistani resistance movement.⁴⁸¹

The 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182 by Sikh separatists seeking revenge on the Indian government remains etched in the minds of many Canadians even today. Considered the worst act of terrorism in Canadian history (killing all 329 on board), Air India Flight 182 has only recently begun to be more openly discussed by Canadian Sikhs.⁴⁸² As noted by a member of SAN, “it’s the younger generation that’s trying to re-evaluate how to proceed, because for the last 25 years it’s just forced people into silence...it’s like we can’t even remember 1984 in our own way without being labelled terrorists.”⁴⁸³ Progressive actors approach cyberspace as a means to soften the negative connotations that have plagued the Sikh community since the 1980s. Blogger Maple Leaf Sikh regards the web as a supportive

⁴⁸⁰ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁴⁸¹ The Khalistani movement was mostly supported during the late 1970s and 1980s in response to violent anti-Sikh riots, the quest for statehood as a form of protection, a Sikh state to ensure representation of rights and freedoms against a Hindu majority state, militancy extremists, terrorist connotation.

⁴⁸² Talwinder Singh Parmar (leader of the Babbar Khalsa) and Inderjit Singh Reyat were implicated in the Air India Flight 182 bombings (June 23 1985) which occurred off the coast of Ireland and the Tokyo Narita Airport. These attacks were found to have had their origins in Vancouver, Canada. Since 1985, one of the main focuses of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service has been militant Sikh organisations.

⁴⁸³ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

outreach tool for today's generation who wish to publicly address the resulting fault lines that emerged after 1985, commenting:

“...the Air India bombing...the entire [legal] process was a mess, and overall the level of profiling that came out of it was terrible for the greater Sikh community. This is where alternative voices [bloggers] have a chance to change the mainstream and create a voice of discussion in the community.”⁴⁸⁴

The web has empowered youth activists to raise awareness around Sikh grievances beyond the scope of the Khalistani resistance movement. Recognising the stigma associated with militant aspects of the movement, respondents largely agreed that avoiding such community taboos would only serve to undermine demands for justice in the future. Put differently, grievances benefit from a sense of publicised ownership. According to Maple Leaf Sikh, this is particularly problematic for the Sikh community, who characteristically shy away from controversy:

“we as a culture avoid things we are not comfortable with, like the ‘big K in the room’ [Khalistan]...we need to become more comfortable discussing our grievances. There was an attack on our people in the 1980s which should not be pushed to the side.”⁴⁸⁵

Past grievances associated with 1984 and appeals for justice inherently reinforce attachments to both the ancestral homeland and the overall symbolic authority of the Golden Temple. By exposing internal hardships online, actors invite audiences to re-evaluate and virtually inscribe their overarching commitment to the Sikh *panth* (community).

Online representations of Sikh collective identity network intertwine faith-based teachings rooted in the Gurdwara with daily reflections and experiences on the ground. At the same time, respondents expressed awareness that youth populations hold flexible

⁴⁸⁴ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁸⁵ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

attachments to the Sikh identity, and as such avoid divisive political positions that may discourage collaborative engagement. In contextualising current youth sentiment, the Langar Hall forum moderator acknowledged that the ethno-religious boundaries of Sikh collective identity have indeed become increasingly unclear over time, commenting:

“I’m starting to see that there is a generation that’s moving beyond the binary. We can move beyond this sort of ‘secular versus religious’ or ‘secular versus fanatic’. We want to close this binary knot [through youth-based online advocacy]...things are a lot more grey than just that”.⁴⁸⁶

4.6.3 Virtual Mobilisation #iPledgeOrange

The ‘I Pledge Orange’ campaign is a notable example of youth-led online advocacy that has also led to globally coordinated mobilisation on the ground. The campaign first surfaced in March 2012, in response to the looming execution date (set for March 31) of Balwant Singh Rajoana, a former police officer found guilty of the 1995 assassination of Chief Minister of Punjab, Beant Singh. Online protests were enabled through the campaign #iPledgeOrange, which was introduced by the Sikh Activist Network on March 22.⁴⁸⁷ Supporters of the campaign were encouraged to share the hashtag on their personal social media networks and express their solidarity with Rajoana by wearing orange, the colour of the sacred Nishan Sahib (Sikh flag).

The hashtag allowed supporters to network across different online platforms and campaign websites, including a virtual petition directed to the House of Commons in the UK.⁴⁸⁸ Campaign organisers also used digital networks to inform the transnational Sikh community of various protest activities, candlelight vigils and Gurdwara meetings taking place globally.⁴⁸⁹ The #iPledgeOrange campaign framed Rajoana’s death sentence as a

⁴⁸⁶ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁴⁸⁷ “SAN – #ipledge - 35,000+Pledges and Counting...” *Sikh Activist Network*, last accessed March 15, 2014. <<http://sikhactivist.net/ipledgeorange-30000-pledges-and-counting>>

⁴⁸⁸ “#ipledgeorange,” last accessed March 15, 2014. <<http://www.ipledgeorange.net/ipledgeorange>>

⁴⁸⁹ “Worldwide events in Honor of Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana,” *The Langar Hall*, last accessed March 15, 2012. <<http://thelangarhall.com/activism/worldwide-events-in-honor-of-bhai-balwant-singh-rajoana/>>

human rights issue, which highlighted the Indian government's continued support of capital punishment.⁴⁹⁰ For the greater Sikh community, the Rajoana case rekindled a sense of unity between self-defined members, particularly youth populations who played an important role in directing the online campaign. With his execution put on hold, the fate of Rajoana currently remains unclear.⁴⁹¹ The #iPledgeOrange campaign has snowballed into a virtual symbol of Sikh collective identity, and is widely used to connect and link various dispersed local populations virtually across the globe.

Figure 4.26 Protests #iPledgeOrange
Facebook Page⁴⁹² and #iPledgeOrange Hashtag⁴⁹³



⁴⁹⁰ "India: Letter To Prime Minister of India Regarding Imminent Execution of Balwant Singh Rajoana," *Amnesty*, last accessed March 30, 2012. <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/011/2012/en>>

⁴⁹¹ "India puts Sikh radical Rajoana's execution on hold," *Bbc.co.uk*, last modified March 28, 2012, last accessed March 30, 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-17532832>>

⁴⁹² I Pledge Orange Facebook page, last accessed March 30, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/IPledgeOrange/photos_stream>

⁴⁹³ #iPledgeOrange Hashtag, *Tagboard*, last searched July 27, 2014. <<https://tagboard.com/iPledgeOrange>>

Sikh articles of faith, (the five K's or *Kakaars*) date back to 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh first established the *Khalsa Panth*. The Turban, worn to protect unshorn hair (*kes*), remains the most visible article of faith in the religion, and is integral to the Sikh collective identity. The Turban serves as a visible marker, allowing self-defined members to recognise fellow Sikhs who may not otherwise be so easily distinguishable. Adorning the Turban signifies a Sikh's spiritual commitment and dedication to both the faith and its followers (the *panth*). As a proclamation of identity, the Turban reinforces a shared sense of tradition, history and morality between those who choose to wear it, regardless of their geographic location. While commitments to the faith may differ at the individual level, all Sikhs are taught to treat the Turban as a symbol of dignity, self-respect and honour. Explaining the significance of the spiritual crown to the faith, international legal director of the United Sikhs, a UK based Sikh NGO, commented "for a Sikh, to wear a Turban is to be human."⁴⁹⁵

In the aftermath of 9/11, the public attitude towards this sacred piece of Sikh attire abruptly transformed from one of intrigue to one of fear-based suspicion. To the dismay of local factions, Turban-wearing Sikhs have been met with hostility and are often incorrectly associated with al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden by the American public due to their cursory physical resemblance. While instances of discrimination, profiling, and hate crimes peaked in the months following 9/11, many who maintain *kes* (unshorn hair) continue to experience a backlash in today's heightened securitised environment of Islamophobia.

In their reflections, respondents often explained the post 9/11 backlash as a period of diasporic reawakening. For many individuals, threats to the Turban are equally considered a direct threat to the future maintenance and preservation of the Sikh religious identity. In tackling the stereotypical terrorist label that continues to undermine the Turban's spiritual significance, contemporary actors place more emphasis on web-based community outreach. "To have good public relations is important, this is something the community often lacks", explains Maple Leaf Sikh.⁴⁹⁶ Recognising the utility of the web in coordinating Sikh perspectives, he adds, "we skate over issues. So it's our [today's generation] job to bring them about online."⁴⁹⁷

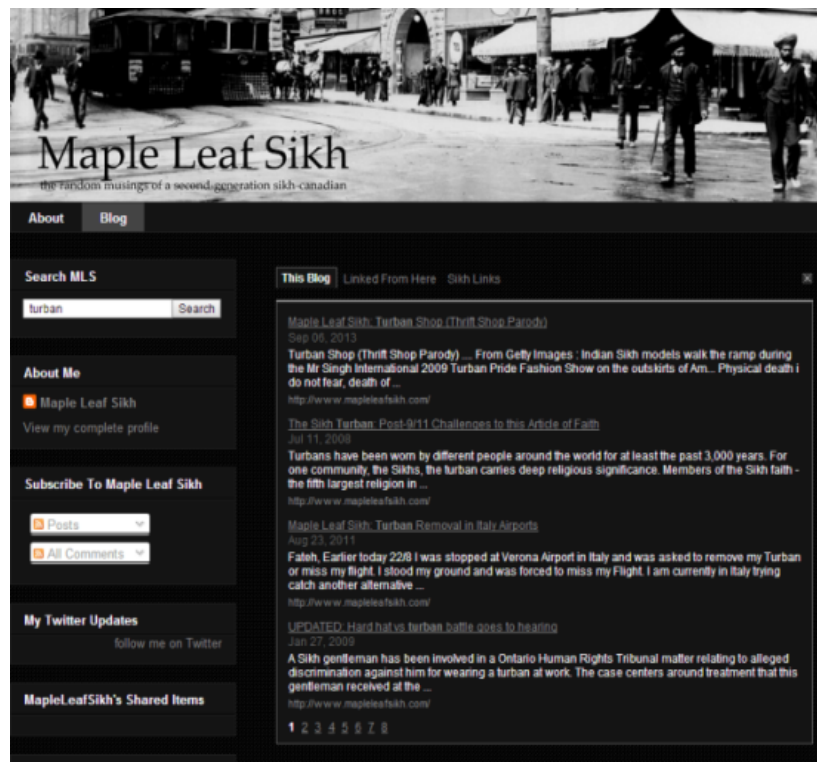
⁴⁹⁵ Author interview with United Sikhs (London Chapter) member on 26 March 2012, London, UK.

⁴⁹⁶ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁴⁹⁷ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

By raising awareness of the challenges Turban-wearing Sikhs continue to face globally, actors vie to promote sentiments of transnational collective unity between dispersed community members. Discussion of contemporary Turban Politics maintains a significant presence online; with actor engagements facilitating the interlinking of community advocacy, religious education and media-based information networks. A basic search of the word ‘Turban’ on the blog of ‘Maple Leaf Sikh’ reveals the overall efficiency of the web in supporting identity-based political bonds. Audiences are presented with an archive of Turban-related resources from multiple websites and social media platforms (including Facebook and YouTube). This includes linked access to Turban tying tutorials, cases of discrimination in the workplace, airport security screening procedures and notable news stories involving Turban-wearing public figures.⁴⁹⁸

Figure 4.27 ‘Maple Leaf Sikh’
Keyword Search: Turban⁴⁹⁹



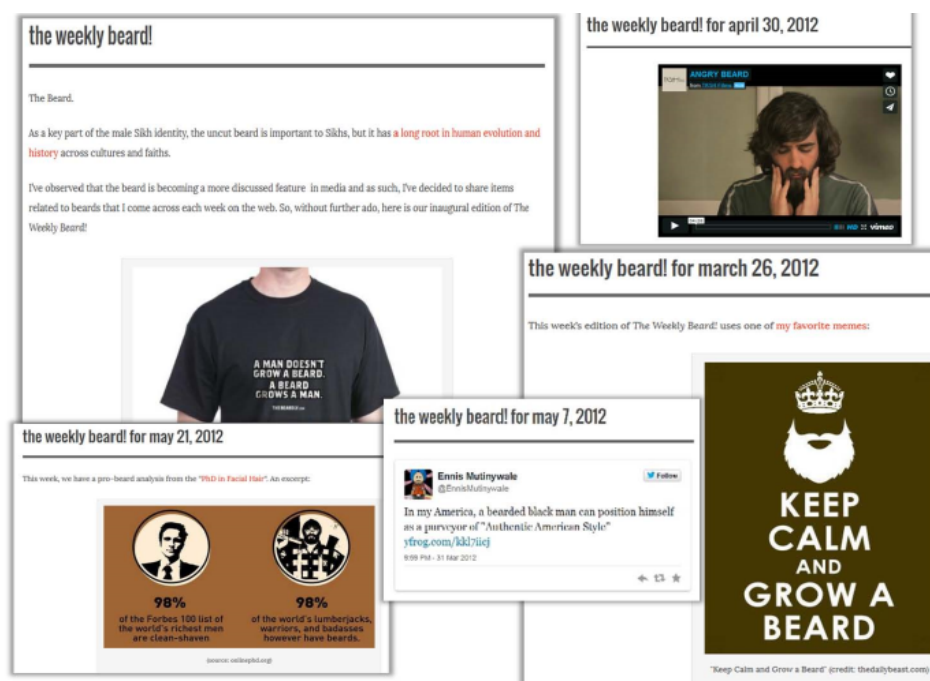
⁴⁹⁸ “Maple Leaf Sikh – Turban Archive,” (Blog), last accessed July 4, 2014.

<<http://www.mapleleafsikh.com/#uds-search-results>>

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

Blogger American Turban similarly caters his discussion of Sikh articles of faith to American audiences. Blog postings, reflective by nature, are informed by host country socio-political realities, “this blog is more about reflecting on news items and issues that affect the Sikh American community” he clarifies.⁵⁰⁰ Cognisant of the flexible ethno-religious attachments Sikh youth may hold relative to their local surroundings, content posted by American Turban extends well beyond the scope of faith. Discussion of unshorn hair (*kes*) extends to mainstream media, as noted in a series of posts aptly titled “The Weekly Beard.” The blog campaign series took place from March 2012 to May 2012, and focused on sharing light-hearted beard-related content from both Sikh and non-Sikh online sources.⁵⁰¹ Audiences are given linked access to online retailers (“The Bearded Store”), short independent films (“Angry Beard”), beard infographics (“PhD in Facial Hair”), viral memes (“Keep Calm and Grow a Beard”) as well as various beard-related social media posts (YouTube, Twitter).⁵⁰²

Figure 4.28 ‘American Turban’ - shared links



⁵⁰⁰ Author interview with American Turban on 12 July 2012, California, USA (via email).

⁵⁰¹ “American Turban – The weekly beard archive,” (Blog), last accessed July 4, 2014.

<<http://americanTurban.com/category/the-weekly-beard/>>

⁵⁰² Ibid.

As virtual watchdogs, these bloggers base their online engagements according to what they as individuals regard as newsworthy. Articles of faith are discussed in the context of democratic freedoms, and boost their presence and reach online through cross-reference hyperlinking. Online platforms empower community members to reflect and publicly reaffirm attachments to the Sikh religious identity.

Beyond individual explorations, digital technologies serve equally as an alternative network for Sikh actors to more readily coordinate empowered responses against marginalisation and discrimination experienced on the ground. The web has proved crucial for the daily upkeep of non-profit organisations like the United Sikhs, which based on corpus statistics, maintains significant authority within Sikh virtual space.⁵⁰³ With 11 chapters spanning across four continents,⁵⁰⁴ the UN affiliated NGO has used virtual technology to pull and package both humanitarian relief and legal resources for those in need since the early 2000s.⁵⁰⁵ Under the slogan ‘Recognize the Human Race as One’, the organisation also directs much of its advocacy efforts towards the freedom of religious expression (regardless of caste or creed).

In contextualising Sikh-specific advocacy, the organisation’s international legal director explained, “90% of our work came in response to 9/11” and that Turban-wearing advocacy included the everyday profiling at airports and discrimination experienced in school and at the workplace.⁵⁰⁶ Recognising the continued hardships experienced by Turban-wearing Sikhs such as himself, a member of the Toronto-based chapter added, “after 9/11 we were facing a lot of problems...human rights issues, identity issues, on a daily basis we deal with them. We want to resolve them if we can.”⁵⁰⁷ The web is a connective tool for community outreach, and provides audiences with information on Sikhism including articles of faith that remain integral to the religious identity. Highlighting the utility of the web as resource hub, the same Toronto based interviewee commented, “we try to use the online for

⁵⁰³ Top ten authority within Sikh virtual space.

⁵⁰⁴ “United Sikhs: Recognize the Human Race as One,” last accessed July 5, 2014.

<<http://www.unitedsikhs.org/about.php>>

⁵⁰⁵ As part of the Sikh Aid project notable sub projects include: Hurricane Sandy Relief, Haiti Earthquake Relief, Pakistan Floods 2010, Japan Earthquake and Tsunami 2011, Myanmar Cyclone ‘Nargis’ Relief. See “United Sikhs: Recognize the Human Race as One.” <<http://www.unitedsikhs.org/sikh-aid.php>>

⁵⁰⁶ Author interview with United Sikhs (London Chapter) member on 26 March 2012, London, UK.

⁵⁰⁷ Author interview with United Sikhs (Toronto Chapter) members on 23 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

our brochures. If you need information about what the Turban is [or] what the Kirpan [ceremonial sword] is, you can download it.”⁵⁰⁸

Observant Sikhs are also able to report instances of faulty screening procedures online (see homepage prompts: report airport Turban screening incident, experience with UK knife-detection measures, hate, bias and crime).⁵⁰⁹ In instances where religious liberties have been compromised, the United Sikhs provide ordinary people with full access to legal advice, counsel and representation in a court of law. The utility of the web in coordinating identity-based political mobilisation is perhaps best exemplified by the United Sikh’s ‘Right to Turban’ campaign, which advocates for the freedom of religious practice. Through a rights-based approach, the campaign demands justice for all Sikhs who have been denied the right to wear the Turban (effectively limiting their ability to practice their faith).

The French government’s 2004 decision to ban all religious symbols (including the Turban) in public schools remains a priority of the campaign and is widely publicised on the website. This includes details of the three landmark Turban cases in which the UN Human Rights Committee ruled in favour of the United Sikhs, concluding that France had indeed violated religious freedoms as guaranteed under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁵¹⁰ The most recent victory occurred on September 26, 2013 and involved French national Shingara Singh, who was unable to renew his passport in 2005 due to authorities insisting he remove his Turban for the required ID photograph.⁵¹¹ Such legal victories are celebrated globally and serve to reinforce the legitimacy of Turban-based advocacy as an important agenda in Sikh advocacy.

Sikh actors increasingly look to secondary virtual technologies (most notably smartphones) as a means to develop alternative digital channels for Turban-based advocacy. Recognising the empowering capabilities of smartphone applications, the US-based Sikh Coalition first launched its ‘FlyRights’ app⁵¹² in April of 2012.⁵¹³ The app was initially

⁵⁰⁸ Author interview with United Sikhs (Toronto Chapter) members on 23 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁰⁹ “United Sikhs: Recognize the Human Race as One,” last accessed July 5, 2014.

⁵¹⁰ “Sikhs Win Third Turban Case at the UN against France,” *United Sikhs*, last accessed March 30, 2014.
<<http://unitedsikhs.org/PressReleases/PRSRLS-08-10-2013-00.html>>

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² “FlyRights,” last accessed March 30, 2014.

<<http://fly-rights.org/>>

⁵¹³ “National Acclaim for FlyRights App,” *Sikh Coalition*, last accessed March 30, 2014.

<<http://www.sikhcoalition.org/advisories/2012/national-acclaim-for-flyrights-app>>

created to combat the discriminatory profiling experienced by Turban wearing Sikhs during airport screenings after 9/11. Downloadable to smartphones free of charge, travellers are able to report airport abuses to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) with significant ease through the software's interface. Recording over 5,000 downloads in the first two days of its release, the app has since widened its appeal to non-Sikh Americans (other ethnic groups, frequent travellers, young mothers, disabled passengers).⁵¹⁴

Upon initial review, the Sikh Coalition reported that while the Department of Homeland Security claimed to have received only eight TSA complaints in 2012, 'FlyRights' app users had logged 170 individual complaints, a significant discrepancy.⁵¹⁵ The Sikh Coalition continues to expand the functional capabilities of the app, most recently launching 'FlyRights 2.0' in November of 2013.⁵¹⁶ Enhancing localised accountability, the updated app empowers travellers with the ability to copy their Member of Congress into the filed TSA complaint. It also provides access to a real-time 'crowd-sourced' map, allowing users to stay informed on the number of complaints filed for each airport across the US. In addition to increased domestic awareness, version 2.0 also includes updated resource links from the TSA.

Since the release of 'FlyRights 2.0', the Sikh Coalition has gained widespread recognition as a champion of civil rights by many media outlets including the Huffington Post, Business Insider, CTV News, and NDTV.⁵¹⁷ Fellow Sikh activists have also applauded

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ "Sikh Groups Alleges U.S. Undercounts Airport Discrimination Complaints," *Huffingtonpost.com*, last modified November 26, 2013, last accessed March 30, 2014.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/26/sikh-airport-discrimination_n_4340049.html>
⁵¹⁶ "[Know Your Rights] FlyRights 2.0 Takes Flight," *Sikh Coalition*, last accessed March 30, 2014. <<http://www.sikhcoalition.org/advisories/2013/know-your-rights-flyrights-20-takes-flight>>

⁵¹⁷ "'FlyRights' App Lets Sikh Travelers Report Complaints of TSA Profiling," *Businessinsider.com*, last modified November 26, 2013, last accessed March 30, 2014. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/flyrights-app-lets-sikh-travelers-report-complaints-of-tsa-profiling-2013-11>>

"'Flyrights' App By Sikh Coalition Allows Quick Reporting of Unfair TSA Profiling," *Huffingtonpost.com*, last modified November 27, 2013, last accessed March 30, 2014.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/27/flyrights-app-sikh-coalition_n_4345101.html>
"Sikh Coalition Discussing FlyRights on CTV," *YouTube.com*, last accessed March 30, 2014.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpWSNDJBzmk>>

"US-Based Sikh activist release FlyRights 2.0 app to report abuse at airports," *NDTV.com*, last modified November 28, 2012, last accessed March 30, 2014.

<<http://gadgets.ndtv.com/apps/news/us-based-sikh-activists-release-flyrights-20-app-to-report-abuse-at-airports-451990>>

the coalition's innovative approach to addressing discriminatory airport screening, a key issue of concern for American Sikhs. In a post entitled 'Sikh Coalition hits a home run with Flyrights app', blogger American Turban praised the app as "precedent-setting" and empowering the "leverage of technology."⁵¹⁸ This was supported by personal reflections from his experiences as a Turban-wearing traveller and a community activist; explaining personalised engagement as essential to the future of the Sikh collective identity.

Figure 4.29 FlyRights 2.0



4.7 Conclusion

By empowering ordinary people with Sikh-specific resources, online activists use digital networks to raise awareness and support issue agendas affecting the future of Sikh collective identity. Threats to the Sikh identity serve as the impetus for the majority of online engagements and are addressed in three key ways online. Firstly, by treating the web as a platform of representation, actors have effectively established a complementary reference point for people to access Sikh specific resources. This supportive function builds upon Gurdwara institutions, which still remain the primary focal hub for religious teachings, community socialising and cultural events. Challenging the top-down hierarchical structure of the Gurdwara however, tech-savvy actors are noted to take a comparatively progressive

⁵¹⁸ "American Turban – Sikh Coalition Hits a Home Run with FlyRights app," (Blog), last accessed March 30, 2014. <<http://americanTurban.com/2012/05/01/sikh-coalition-hits-a-home-run-with-flyrights-app/>>

approach online. Youth audiences are encouraged to personalise their engagements and openly share their perspectives with limited judgment or slander.

Secondly, online platforms provide Sikh actors with additional resources to readdress and reframe community grievances. Traumas associated with 1984 are presented as not only a Sikh issue, but also as a human rights issue that deserves more attention from the international community, as supported by organisations like Amnesty International. Appeals for justice employ a rights-based approach in an effort to remove the stigma associated with Sikh militancy and the 1980s Khalistani secessionist movement. With a sense of ownership, online actors tailor homeland grievances to reflect host country social fabric. There is a strong emphasis of on-the-ground local realities, whether or not the homeland is one of them. Calls for mobilisation are streamlined through human-rights frames and democratic principles (freedom, equality, justice) from the ground up, but the complexities demonstrate that the triadic approach is far too simple, and that a romanticised homeland is no longer the main factor in the equation.

Finally, actors remain focused on resolving the discrimination many Turban-wearing Sikhs continue to experience in the wake of 9/11. Sikh virtual space provides audiences with ample access to Turban-specific educational resources, underlining the importance of community outreach in maintaining the sanctity of the article of faith. Turban-wearing Sikhs are equally able to share their experiences online, a source of unity for otherwise dispersed populations. By combining legal rights and network resources, advocacy organisations vie to protect the integrity of the Sikh collective identity from the ground up. Expansive digital technologies have led to more personalised and communicative processes of mobilisation that are introducing new identity politics to world affairs—politics which again are more issue-led than homeland-related. The findings presented in this case study are expanded upon in chapter seven, which presents a comparative analysis of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics.

5. TAMIL ONLINE IDENTITY POLITICS

“...now it’s about being nuanced; the mode of struggle has changed. Before I was on the streets, protesting....now I am networking, that’s what the struggle is about; links and a vision...”⁵¹⁹

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the web-based representations of Tamil diaspora politics. As a community largely defined by conflict-driven migration, contemporary identity-based political bonds remain rooted in homeland grievances and the struggle for national liberation of the Tamil Eelam in North East Sri Lanka. Decades of ethnic conflict and state-based censorship in Sri Lanka have pushed actors involved in Tamil diaspora politics to develop innovative networking techniques. In the wake of the LTTE’s defeat in 2009, this research will demonstrate that online platforms have come to serve two primary functions. First, as a mobilising structure, the web provides a supportive platform for contemporary actors to gain recognition and demand accountability for the alleged war crimes committed against innocent Tamil civilians by Sri Lankan authorities during the end stages of the civil war in May 2009. Second, by enabling identity representations, the web has offered actors a transnational network to liquefy and decentralise sentiments of Tamil nationhood. Corpus statistics indicate that the majority of online activities centre on current news affairs and themes of human rights that link dispersed community members. By using new technologies to disarticulate the Tamil nationalist identity from Sri Lankan territorial borders, tech savvy youth populations are increasingly important actors in creating greater awareness of contemporary Tamil diaspora politics.

⁵¹⁹ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

5.1.1 Chapter Structure

In exploring the online representation of Tamil diaspora politics, the chapter begins with a historical overview of Tamil grievances and past struggles experienced in the ancestral homeland. Background information on the LTTE and the role the militant organisation has played in fuelling Tamil nationalism is provided in this section. To contextualise the post-2009 rebuilding phase, the section also discusses the conflict-driven migration patterns that continue to shape contemporary Tamil narratives. The chapter then provides a detailed analysis of Tamil virtual space, introducing corpus findings from the web cartography results of the Tamil e-Diaspora Atlas. The visual representations and statistical data presented in this chapter can be accessed through the e-Diasporas Atlas website (map.e-diasporas.fr). News-based websites provide real-time updates on Tamil specific affairs and play a key role in connecting dispersed populations with homeland issue agendas.

Human rights-based online activities focus on raising awareness of the alleged war crimes and genocidal acts committed by Sri Lankan governing authorities against innocent Tamil civilians. Infused with ethno-nationalist symbolic markers, community based websites enable Tamils in various countries of settlement to assemble virtually. These activity subsets serve as the bases for the online network analysis put forward in this chapter, and point to new expressive forms of political expression that cannot be solely explained by the triadic approach outlined in Chapter 2.

This is followed with a discussion of web-based content analysis results, which highlight the disjointed or newly evolving relationship between identity and territory that extends beyond nation-state container discussed in Chapter 2, and the prevalent narratives interwoven across Tamil virtual space. The final section of the chapter draws upon actor interviews to assess the relationship between online and offline Tamil diaspora politics. Reflections from online actors are noted to focus largely on the connective opportunities and communicative capabilities of new technologies that empower information dissemination, mobilisation processes and the articulation of Tamil grievances. By infusing narratives of homeland struggle online, contemporary actors use ethno-nationalist sentiments to spread the Tamil 'nation' online. In the current rebuilding phase, the leadership vacuum left by the LTTE has caused much internal confusion over future prospects for self-determination and national liberation of Tamil Eelam in the North East.

5.2 Background

5.2.1 Narratives of Homeland Struggle

With the Sinhalese accounting for roughly 74% of Sri Lanka's total population (an estimated 18 million) many Tamils feel a clear ethnic separation between 'legitimate' power and social platform access within the country.⁵²⁰ As the ethnic majority, the Sinhalese gained relative power over Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) during the period of decolonisation. During this time the internal Sinhalese population spearheaded most of the nationalist calls for independence. These realities fuelled the establishment of a Tamil national press in the 1930s, which after Sri Lankan independence in 1948 became a major platform for calls for Tamil self-determination.⁵²¹ During the 1950s, inequalities were further exacerbated by multiple policies that marginalised the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. Most notable was the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, in which Sinhalese was made the country's official language.⁵²² This situation was further exacerbated by the multiple land reform policies that called for the resettlement of Sinhalese peasants and slum-dwellers in what was commonly regarded as the Tamil homeland of North East Sri Lanka (Tamil Eelam).⁵²³ Marginalisation continued in the early 1970s, where education policies were altered so that Tamil students were required to obtain higher examination scores than the Sinhalese in order to be admitted to university.⁵²⁴

5.2.2 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Although ethnic clashes and public rioting first emerged in the 1940s, it was only after the formation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that Tamils established a more organised and cohesive group. Militant by nature, the LTTE was formed by the Tamil Student Union in the mid-1970s as an aggressive revamp of the Tamil New Tigers.⁵²⁵ Since its creation, the LTTE has focused on the injustices experienced by many Tamils at the hands of 'illegitimate' Sinhalese majority populations. Tamil grievances have for decades revolved around the atrocities experienced by innocent civilians at the hands of a corrupt Sri Lankan

⁵²⁰ Sarah Wayland, "Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora," *Review of International Studies* 30 (3) (2004): 412.

⁵²¹ Maya Ranganathan, "Understanding Eelam through the Diaspora's Online Engagement," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23 (5) (2009): 713.

⁵²² Fuglerud 2001, 31.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

army.⁵²⁶ Ethnic tensions reached all-time high in July 1983 when the LTTE killed 13 soldiers. After a series of riots (commonly remembered as ‘Black July’), the tension exploded into a full-on civil war. In contemporary times, both events have continued to spearhead narratives of injustice and subsequent calls for the independent state of Tamil Eelam in the North East.

Until a temporary ceasefire was called in February 2002, the Sri Lanka civil war spanned some 18 years, leaving hundreds of thousands dead.⁵²⁷ It was only in 2009, with the death of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran (commonly known as VP) that the rebel organisation officially laid down its arms. However, after years of ongoing conflict, 2009 was hardly a victory for governing officials. We note for example that even during the 1980s and 1990s, the LTTE consistently made efforts to disseminate nationalist songs and Prabhakaran’s speeches to the public.⁵²⁸ By establishing the launch point for a united narrative of injustice, the efforts of past LTTE media campaigns cannot be suppressed. Decades of ethnic rioting and a 27-year civil war continue to fuel sentiments of Tamil collective identity across various countries of settlement that have now found a home, an archive or repository online, but which, as the evidence will show, are still instrumental and expressive.

5.2.3 Conflict-Driven Migration Patterns

Decades of ethnic animosity and marginalisation have translated into a situation in which many Tamils assumed a conflict-based collective identity that remains inherently attached to the homeland struggle. This is especially true when considering Tamil migration patterns emerging from Sri Lanka during this time. Although many Tamils emigrated in the early years of Sri Lankan independence, a mass exodus began during the 1983 civil war.⁵²⁹ Between 1983 and 1998 over 450,000 Tamils sought asylum in Western Europe and North America.⁵³⁰ Such amplified migration patterns were particularly obvious in Canada, where

⁵²⁶ Shyam Tekwani, “The Tamil diaspora, Tamil militancy, and the Internet,” *Asia.com: Asia Encounters the Internet* (2003): 187.

⁵²⁷ Mark P. Whitaker, “Tamilnet. com: some reflections on Popular Anthropology, Nationalism, and the Internet,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (3) (2004a): 476.

⁵²⁸ With the advent of the Internet, much of this material is now available for download on multiple websites, see: Tekwani 2003, 188.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁵³⁰ Wayland 2004, 414.

the Tamil population increased from just 2,000 in 1983 to an estimated 200,000 after the 2000s (90% of whom reside in the Greater Toronto Area).⁵³¹ Past trauma and homeland grievances remain interwoven across contemporary communities in countries of settlement. Indicative of generational shifts, the Tamil struggle for national liberation has moved beyond the shadows of the LTTE. ‘Black July’ and the 1983 civil war continue to serve as annual reminders of the trauma and injustice endured by ‘brothers and sisters’ in the North East. In the digital age, the individuals who publicly link themselves to past traumas reshape the narratives surrounding historical grievances, pointing to an imagined primordialism that exists beyond essentialist analyses. The web has only expanded the opportunities and motivations of Tamil activists and community members, who invite wider audiences to engage in online-offline processes of mobilisation. This can be seen by the increasingly networked annual public celebration of Hero’s Day (November 27) commemorating the Tamils and LTTE members who died during the struggle for freedom.

5.2.4 Post-Conflict 2009 Rebuilding Phase

In the wake of increased violence, the 2009 Sri Lankan offensive (which ultimately led to the defeat of the LTTE) made it clear to many Tamils that it relied upon the greater transnational community to seek justice for neglected populations of the North East. Playing into these moral obligations, Tamil activists use digital networks to foster connections between dispersed populations across the globe. In the current rebuilding phase, Tamil collective identity remains rooted in ethno-nationalist calls for self-determination, which stem from both the LTTE and the views held by today’s non-state actors.⁵³² Although the LTTE may have spearheaded the fight for Tamil Eelam, it is now the case that self-defined diasporic actors maintain a sense of ownership of the ever-evolving borderless grievances of the Tamil nation. This shift in power has enabled actors to expand upon grievance narratives to readdress traumatic injustices through universal human rights. This fits with the master framework I introduced in Chapter 2, fitting diaspora politics to global narratives that strive to readdress grievances, which are in themselves important issues in contemporary diaspora politics—perhaps even to some extent eclipsing homeland ideologies.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

Lacking a clear authority or a grounded organisational/institutional structure, transnational Tamil networks after 2009 remain leaderless and relatively flexible. Tamil actors in their online engagement strategies are wary not to take away from the overall reputation of the Tamil people and the legitimacy of their grievance claims. Online activists assume a level of responsibility in maintaining, strengthening and propelling community narratives forward. The online network linkages traced through Big Data highlight two specific trends in terms of identity-based political engagements and network representations. First, contemporary second and third generation youth populations are becoming increasingly active in the Tamil struggle across online and offline environments. Second, with the intention of separating the Tamil community from the negative image associated with militant aspects of the LTTE, these actors place much emphasis on public relations strategies in countries of settlement.

Innovative networking has come to epitomise Tamil advocacy. There is a common belief among actors that Tamil newspapers have been periodically censored by governing authorities during times of conflict. As a result of decades of censorship in Sri Lanka, contemporary actors continuously look to improve and expand upon networking techniques. The decentralised characteristics of web 2.0 online platforms empower actors with communicative capabilities to transcend physical and vertical hurdles, making it easier to bypass state-based censorship from the bottom up (to and from Sri Lanka). This has been instrumental in contributing to an overall disenchantment with state-based apparatuses that are believed to have institutionally repressed the flow and dissemination of 'newsworthy' Tamil affairs to and from the North East.

Considering that only 30% of all homes in Sri Lanka have access to the web⁵³³, the majority of Tamil-specific online traffic comes from users physically located outside the homeland. Motivations surrounding identity-based political engagements remain inherently linked to a legacy of conflict, struggle and mass exodus. Community engagement in host countries for example, has largely been in reaction to the violent history of Sri Lankan civil unrest. Moreover, the vast majority of Tamil migration has occurred within the last 25 years, meaning that it is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Tamil migrants in countries of

⁵³³ Mark Whitaker, *Internet Counter Counter-insurgency: TamilNet.com and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, *Native on the Net: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples in the Virtual Age*, ed., Kyra Landzelius (London: Routledge, 2004b), 183.

settlement that uphold democratic values may carry a sense of guilt-based nostalgia—they feel incredibly ‘lucky’ to have escaped conflict war zones and subsequently believe it to be their personal obligation to stay involved in the local homeland struggle from afar.⁵³⁴

Online public outreach for this reason in particular often focuses on community representation and the greater Tamil nation of ‘brothers and sisters’. Calls for statehood in Tamil Eelam alternate with a focus on the reconciliation of political grievances, which includes acknowledgement from the international community. In both cases, the impetus for engagement remains community maintenance and the preservation of Tamil collective identity. Online actors seek to weave audience interactions to the offline realities that bind the transnational Tamil community beyond the triadic model. In the current rebuilding phase, the web serves as a key platform for diaspora advocacy networks to educate and inform transnational audiences of Tamil political grievances and the struggle for justice in the North East.

5.3 Virtual Platforms: Web Cartography - Tamil e-Diaspora Atlas

Informed by the methodologies of the e-Diasporas atlas project, the following section presents key findings from the Tamil e-diaspora corpus. Online Tamil identity politics are shown to focus on uniting and streamlining transnational community connections as increasingly important sources of influence on themes of identity. This means that for the Tamil e-diaspora corpus, the web appears to serve as a strategic resource hub that supports processes of mobilisation and enables new forms of active representations of the transnational Tamil ‘nation’. Statistical data and digital mapping results obtained through the e-Diasporas Atlas project indicate that the majority of online Tamil activity centres on news, human rights, and community. As discussed above, political issue agendas remain encased with mutable memories of injustice, violence and the conflict-driven mass exodus of the 1980s. In contemporary times, cyberspace has provided an alternative platform to educate younger generations of Tamils and non-Tamils alike about the past and present struggles endured by populations in the North East. With the ability to jump physical gaps and bypass state-based hurdles (censorship), many contemporary actors regard digital network technology as essential to future betterment and preservation of the Tamil identity.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 418.

Lacking a physically grounded centre, these dynamics have been neglected—or at least are given little systematic attention—and virtual engagements invite more decentralised networking of the greater transnational community. Online articulations claiming to represent the Tamil diaspora focus on unresolved political grievances and associated calls for statehood in the North East (Tamil Eelam). Analysis of the Tamil corpus indicates that ‘newsworthy’ affairs are often framed by historical grievance narratives, commemorative events and local activities in countries of settlement. This includes pleas to the international community as expressed as a master frame of human ‘rights-based’ grammar (genocide, injustice, war crimes). Through community-specific audio and visual splash imagery, Tamil websites also leverage sentiments of shared collective identity. Corpus statistics serve as a point of inference to better understand how narratives of struggle are streamlined and strengthened from the ‘bottom up’. Focusing on news, human rights and community-based activities, the following analysis presents key findings from the e-Diasporas atlas Tamil corpus.

5.3.1 Tamil Corpus - Online Activity

The Tamil corpus consists of 243 nodes (websites) created through a series of automatic crawls as part of the e-Diasporas atlas project.⁵³⁵ The methodological chapter of the thesis provides a more detailed account of the coding and classification scheme followed, along with a description of the cartographic software tools used to produce digital maps. This chapter presents research findings that link to make up the online identity politics of the Tamil diaspora only possible through capture tracing with help of Big Data to counter the methodological and theoretical limitations of previous conceptions. For this reason, the following analysis will focus primarily on the activity classification subset of the Tamil corpus.⁵³⁶ Node (website) linkages are considered in terms of overall representation and influence within the corpus.

⁵³⁵ See methodology section of this study for a more detailed account of the methodological and technical tools employed. All of the data presented in this virtual analysis can be accessed through the interactive maps: < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=map&map=58§ion=26>>

⁵³⁶ The corpus is classified based on the following: type of site, actor, activity, secondary activity, location, language.

Figure 5.1 Tamil Corpus Activity Map

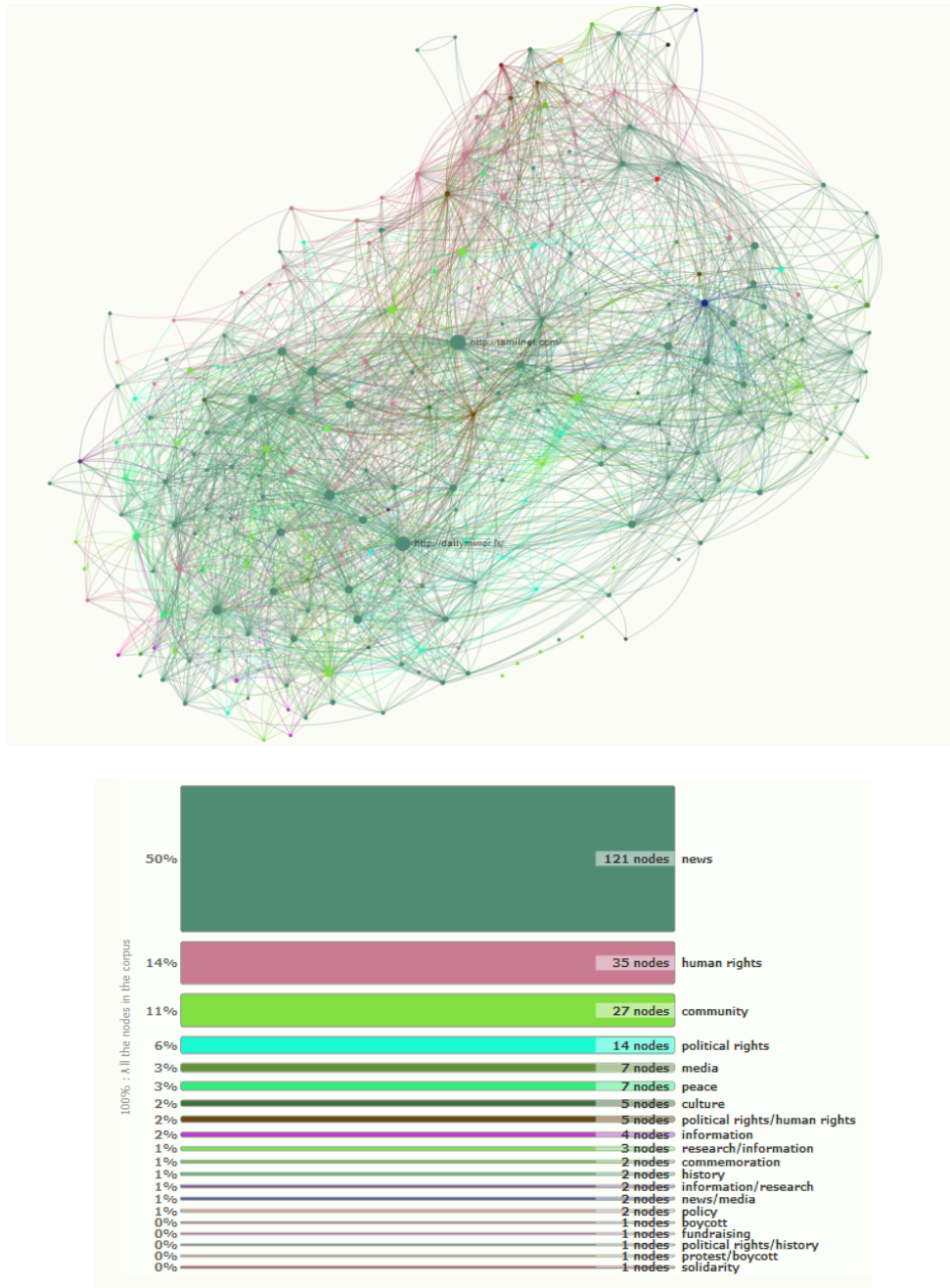


Figure 5.1 provides a visual representation of Tamil activities online⁵³⁷. Corpus findings indicate that the majority of activity linkages stem from news, human rights and community-based website nodes (183 out of 243 nodes). As key news authorities, tamilnet.com and

⁵³⁷ Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5§ion=26>>

dailymirror.lk structure and steer the flow between corpus node linkages. We note the dense cluster of activity at the bottom left of the corpus, an area in which both of these nodes maintain an influential presence. Discussed in greater detail below, tamilnet.com serves as a key point of reference for Tamil-specific news based activities.

While community specific, news based nodes characteristically provide daily updates on newsworthy domestic and international affairs through informative, fact-based website interfaces. Equally visible in the bottom left cluster are human rights-based linkages, which maintain relations with nodes concentrated at the top of the corpus. This differs from community-based nodes, which are structured more evenly and maintain linkages throughout the corpus. Overall, the activity isolation highlights the way news-based node linkages flow throughout the corpus, providing much of the structure. Statistical data obtained from the mapping portion of this study complements the above visual representations of online Tamil activity. To gain a better understanding of the proportional influence of these activities, we can examine link statistics (edges) to consider the overall authority and ‘reach’ of corpus node subsets.

Linking Corpus Node Edges

| Edges Related to the entire Tamil Corpus (% of influence overall within the network) | |
|---|-----|
| News | 81% |
| Human Rights | 23% |
| Community | 19% |

The above table offers an insight into the relational influence of activity subsets as calculated by the total number of linkages between corpus nodes. News-based nodes maintain inbound and outbound linkages (edges) throughout the majority of the Tamil corpus. In total, news-

based activity relates to 81% of all corpus linkages—which is significantly greater than the influence of human rights and community-based node linkages combined. The corpus numerical data presented below allows for a deeper understanding of the flow of linkages between and within activity subsets.

| Corpus Activity | Corpus Nodes | Corpus Representation | Inbound Density | Internal Density | Outbound Density |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| News | 121 | 50% | 5.1 | 6.4 | 2.8 |
| Human Rights | 35 | 14% | 2.7 | 5.1 | 4.4 |
| Community | 27 | 11% | 4 | 4 | 3.8 |
| Political Rights | 14 | 6% | 1.9 | 3.1 | 4 |
| Media | 7 | 3% | 1.9 | 2 | 3.1 |
| Peace | 7 | 3% | 3.6 | 8.2 | 5.6 |
| Culture | 5 | 2% | 1.2 | 0 | 5.2 |

The table above presents numerical and statistical data obtained from the Tamil activity corpus. It provides the total number of corpus nodes for key activity subsets. Corpus representation is calculated relative to the total number of nodes within the Tamil corpus (243 nodes in total). Density is understood as the flow of linkages (edges) between and within activity subsets. Inbound density signifies the flow of external nodes ‘linking in’ to the particular subset activity, whereas outbound density signifies ‘linking out’ to nodes beyond the specific activity subset. Internal density is defined as the linkages between nodes belonging to the same activity subset.

Corpus data indicates a higher internal density for news, human rights, and peace-based online activity. Website nodes maintain a higher proportion of internal mutual linkages (compared to inbound and outbound links) within each of these activity subsets. A higher internal density signifies a more intermeshed and clustered relationship between respective nodes. Accounting for 50% of all nodes, news based activity maintains corpus authority through its ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) linkages. This differs from both human rights and peace-based activity, as apart from internal density, both subsets maintain a comparatively ‘in deficit’ link flow to external nodes (inbound<outbound). Corpus statistics most notably highlight the limited representation of culture-based activity nodes (2%) within greater Tamil virtual space. Indicative of the current (post-2009) rebuilding phase, the online linkages that structure Tamil virtual space illustrate a hierarchy of purpose rooted in Tamil grievances, issue agendas and political claims. Collectively news, human rights and community-based activity subsets account for 75% of all nodes, which as discussed below, maintains a significant presence throughout the corpus.

Top 10 (authoritative) Tamil diaspora Websites

| Website | | Actor | Activity | Language | Location | Inbound Links |
|---|------------|--------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|---------------|
| http://tamilnet.com/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | English | USA | 105 |
| http://dailymirror.lk/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | English | None | 96 |
| http://srilankaguardian.org/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | English Tamil Sinhalese | USA | 60 |
| http://hindustantimes.com/ | News Group | Organisation | News | English | India | 50 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|----|
| http://lankaweb.com/ | Site | Group | Culture | English | USA | 49 |
| http://groundviews.org/ | News Group | Group | News | English | USA | 45 |
| http://hindu.com/ | News Group | Organisation | News | English | India | 45 |
| http://thehindu.com/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | English | India | 44 |
| http://tamilcanadian.com/ | Site | Group | Community | English Tamil | Canada | 43 |
| http://lankaenews.com/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | English Tamil Sinhalese | Australia | 42 |

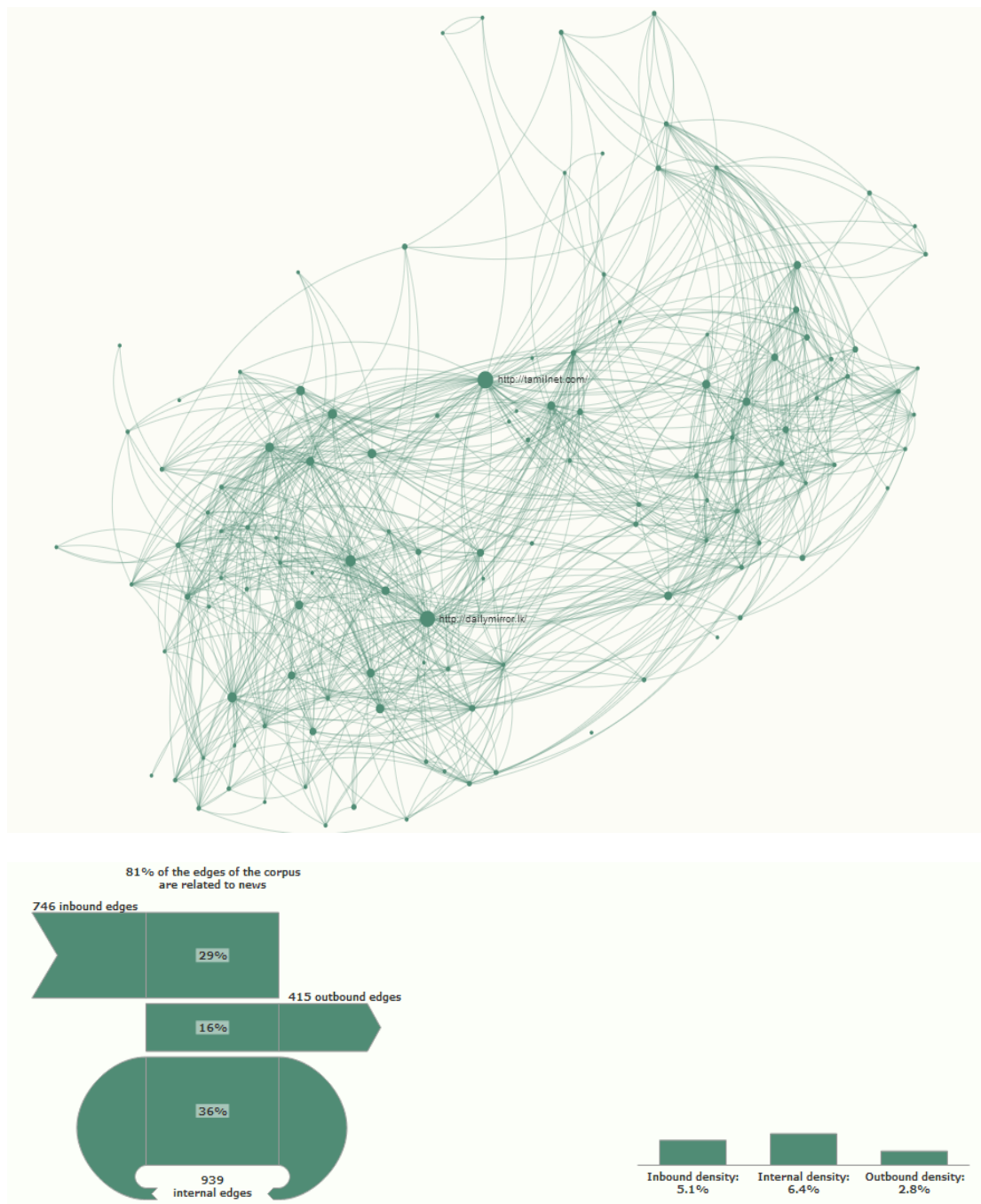
The table above presents the top ten Tamil corpus authorities as informed by inbound linkages. We note that the majority of corpus authorities empower news-based activities. Nodes characteristically represent large-scale actors (not individual bloggers), and are defined either formally as organisations or informally as group collectives. Website domain names imply that the subjects of discussion will be newsworthy community affairs. With the exception of hindustantimes.com, hindu.com, and thehindu.com (Indian news sources) nodes are specific to the Tamil community. Corpus authorities are registered to locations outside of the ancestral homeland, underlining the important role diaspora advocacy networks play in maintaining transnational linkages between online and offline environments. With a focus on domestic affairs, tamilcanadian.com is the only authority to explicitly cater to the Tamil community located in Canada.

Corpus authorities serve as online resource hubs that streamline transnational Tamil connections through hyperlink flows. Countering blocked opportunity structures, cyberspace provides an open source platform for globally dispersed Tamil populations to stay informed

of salient newsworthy community affairs. This includes important updates on current political conditions in the North East, responses from international bodies (the UN in particular) and local activities taking place in countries of settlement. By disseminating ‘newsworthy’ community updates, corpus authorities play an important role in feeding calls for mobilisation. Tamil virtual space remains loosely bound through narratives, trauma and past political grievances, which are often expressed through a rights-based agenda. Corpus authorities function as reference hubs for people who wish to stay informed about current affairs and world events affecting the transnational Tamil community. As presented below, corpus findings indicate that the majority of Tamil-based online activities focus on resolving past political grievances, post-war (2009) and present-day transnational politics.

5.3.2 Tamil Corpus - News/Information Gateway

Figure 5.2 Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity - News



Consisting of 121 nodes (50% of all corpus nodes), the above map isolation provides a virtual snapshot of news-based corpus activity.⁵³⁸ When compared against the Tamil activity map presented above, it is clear that news-based linkages organise to form the structural boundaries of the corpus. As discussed below, the isolation most visibly highlights tamilnet.com and dailymirror.lk as key central authorities within the news activity subset. Based on corpus statistics, news-based nodes are comparatively more dense than inbound or outbound flows (internal density 6.4%). A greater internal density implies more frequent cross-referencing between news websites, indicating a relationship of interactive connectivity within the subset. Linkages from other primary activity subsets are equally noteworthy, as beyond internal density, news websites maintain a significantly 'in profit' (inbound>outbound) relationship with external activity subsets (inbound density 5.1%).

In the post-2009 rebuilding phase, newsworthy affairs are a source of interest and unity for the transnational Tamil community. In connecting offline, on the ground realities to online activity networks, it is important to keep in mind that moderators of these websites do of course differ in their approaches to cyberspace. The evidence will show that website interfaces can just as easily present news through objective 'just the facts' information as they can build upon graphic imagery. What remains constant however is the notable use of rights-based language, which has aggregated to form the thematic boundaries and communicative discourse for much of the online representations of Tamil identity politics.

⁵³⁸ Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity - News. < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5§ion=26&value=news>>

Figure 5.3 Tamil Corpus News Hyperlink Flow (edges)

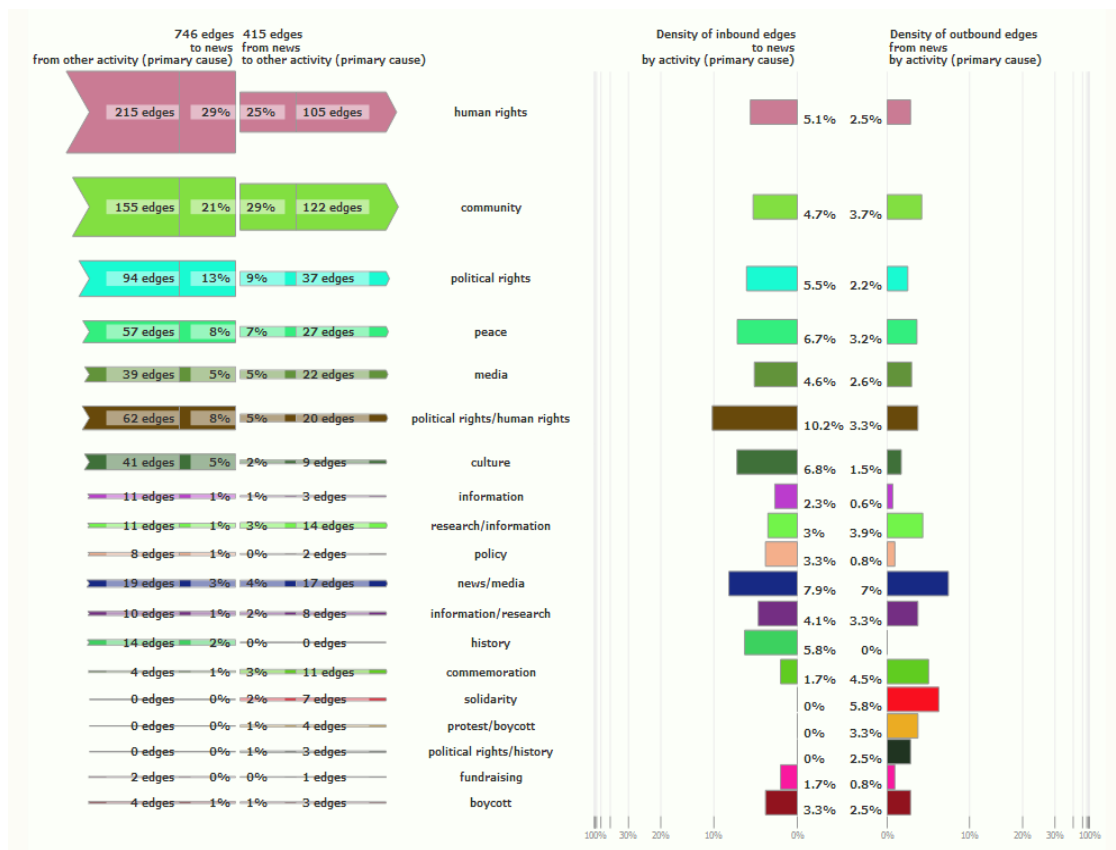


Figure 5.3 presents the inbound and outbound linkages flowing between news-based activity nodes in greater relational detail. With a greater number of linkages flowing inward, news maintains a significant ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship with nodes based in human rights (215 links), community (155), political rights (94) and media (57). In total, the above activities account for 521 links, which is considerably greater than outbound linkages to these external activity nodes (286 links in total). Accounting for 73% of all nodes, these activities make up online Tamil diaspora politics and shape and inform much of the overall corpus network structure.

As a point of reference, news-based nodes maintain their ‘in profit’ authority by providing access to daily updates of transnational Tamil affairs across various countries of settlement and in the North East. Moderators of external activity nodes ‘link in’ to news-based nodes as a way to stabilise their online presence. This is particularly true of nodes based in human and political rights, which often frame and justify grievance claims through

updates of (neglected) on-the-ground conditions in the ancestral homeland. Calls for mobilisation follow the above link flow pattern. Moderators of community and media-based nodes seek to reinforce the relevance of their online presence by linking into timely news sources. As I discussed in Chapter 2, this marks a movement away from the idea of return towards the start of a new methodology by which the theoretically weak can assume romantic connotations through online networks, against which homeland socio-political realities serve as a backdrop for contemporary transnational linkages that feed these mobilisation processes.

Practices of active gathering and commemorative observance are often a source of discussion within these networks. We note for example that news-based nodes maintain an 'in deficit' (inbound<outbound) relationship with activity nodes based on commemoration (outbound density 4.5%) and solidarity (outbound density 5.8%). Greater outbound flow indicates that past political grievances continue to remain relevant in contemporary times. Moderators of news-based websites link in to commemoration and solidarity subsets to update their audiences of the various offline activities being organised in honour of past collective traumas. This includes annual remembrance services (Black July and Heroes' Day) commemorating the Tamil 'brothers and sisters' who have lost their lives in various ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka. These activities go beyond simple observance, and are forward thinking. Older models and approaches to diaspora politics fail to see this. Demands for reparations have led to online news outlets informing audiences of solidarity campaigns advocating for the Tamil right to self-determination. Setting past grievances to the fore and maintaining their relevance, news-based websites embed their headlines with 'rights-based' language (suffering, injustice, genocide, war crimes). Key subset authorities highlight the standardisation of rights-based news throughout Tamil virtual space.

Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside news that are cited by the most nodes in news

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM news |
|---|----------------------------|
| http://dailymirror.lk/ | 53 |
| http://tamilnet.com/ | 51 |
| http://srilankaguardian.org/ | 35 |
| http://thehindu.com/ | 26 |
| http://hindustantimes.com/ | 25 |
| http://pathivu.com/ | 25 |
| http://lankaenews.com/ | 25 |
| http://tamilwin.com/ | 24 |
| http://athirvu.com/ | 23 |
| http://groundviews.org/ | 23 |

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside news that are cited by the most nodes in other activity

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://tamilnet.com/ | 54 |
| http://dailymirror.lk/ | 43 |
| http://lankaweb.com/ | 26 |
| http://hindustantimes.com/ | 25 |
| http://srilankaguardian.org/ | 25 |
| http://hindu.com/ | 23 |
| http://groundviews.org/ | 22 |
| http://news.lk/ | 21 |
| http://tamilguardian.com/ | 20 |
| http://colombopage.com/ | 20 |

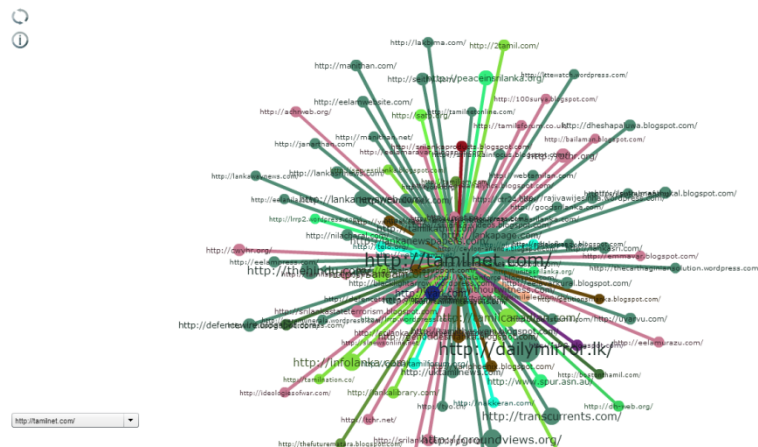
Subgraph and representative authorities highlight the structural influence of news-based website nodes—tamilnet.com, dailymirror.lk and srilankaguardian.org in particular. As discussed previously, these nodes are the top three authorities in the Tamil corpus. Exploration data of corpus linkages confirms the centrality of each of these respective nodes within Tamil virtual space. As shown below, website interfaces are geared towards self-defined Tamil community members—audiences with a vested interest in the daily affairs of

the Tamil people. Neighbour exploration results confirm the centrality and authority of tamilnet.com, the most frequently cited node of the entire corpus (105 referees). Node linkage exploration provides a visualisation of the activity reach of the node, illustrating that links to news and human rights are most common.

Tamilnet.com Neighbours⁵³⁹

| Referers <i>(Nodes that cite http://tamilnet.com/)</i> | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by http://tamilnet.com/)</i> | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://tamilnet.com/)</i> |
|---|---|--|
| 105 | 3 | 6 |

Figure 5.4 Tamilnet.com Node Linkage Exploration



⁵³⁹ Tamilnet.com Corpus Node Exploration.
<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=71&map=58&node=19§ion=26>>



Figure 5.5 <http://tamilnet.com/>

Tamil actors based in North America and Europe first established Tamilnet.com⁵⁴⁰ in 1995.⁵⁴¹ With minimal online traffic support, the website was reformatted in 1996 by Dharmeratnam Sivaram (better known as Taraki), a prominent Tamil columnist.⁵⁴² Taraki had two main goals: to improve the website's longevity (by avoiding censorship) and to legitimise the website as a key hub for newsworthy information on Tamil affairs across the globe. One of the conditions of the revamp was to select webmasters outside Sri Lanka, to avoid domestic censorship.⁵⁴³

To counter criticisms from Sri Lankan authorities and to separate the website from the LTTE, news is supported by secondary sources such as the BBC, Reuters, the Associated

⁵⁴⁰ "Tamil Net," last accessed November 14, 2012.

<<http://www.tamilnet.com>>

⁵⁴¹ Web developers were characteristically middle aged men, from engineering and computer science backgrounds. See Whitaker 2004b, 256.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 257.

⁵⁴³ Whitaker 2004a, 478.

Press, and The Hindu.⁵⁴⁴ The revamp also included a reduction in nationalist rhetoric, patriotic poems and martyr imagery. Information, while similar in nature, was stripped down to ‘just the facts’, with titles reading, “Seven killed in Vanni clashes”, (December 10, 1997), and “Another journalist arrested”, (July 20, 1998).⁵⁴⁵ Through this remodelling, tamilnet.com gained a considerable increase in followers, reinforcing the website as a legitimate provider of Tamil-specific news. Within just a year of its rebirth in 1997, the website was noted to have received some 3 million hits per month, marking a significant increase in online traffic.⁵⁴⁶ But the rise of Tamilnet.com led to tragedy; after a series of death threats, Taraki was killed in April 2005. Various organisational bodies such as ‘Reporters without Borders’ and UNESCO publicly condemned Taraki’s murder, and demanded a public investigation take place.⁵⁴⁷

We can look to the website interface of tamilnet.com to gain a better understanding of why the node maintains such influential authority online. Stylistically, interface content is primarily text-based, complemented with secondary audio/visual materials. News is presented in chronological order, with past stories archived and available for search online. Website content is introduced in an objective ‘just the facts’ format, weaving news stories with community specific ‘rights-based’ grammar (UN, war, international law). Moderators frame newsworthy Tamil political affairs through grievance claims, which easily attach and resonate with overarching community narratives of endless suffering, struggle and injustice in the North East. From this, we can see that there is a potential for Tamil diasporic issues to become issues in world affairs

This differs significantly from dailymirror.lk, which caters to a comparatively wider (Sri Lankan) regional audience.⁵⁴⁸ As opposed to Tamil-specific newsworthy affairs, emphasis is placed on providing access to a diverse array of regionally relevant content (including news, travel, business and sports). This includes breaking headlines and top stories (aggregated by total online views). Much like a newspaper, the website interface has a high

⁵⁴⁴ Whitaker 2004b, 257.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 265.

⁵⁴⁶ Whitaker 2004a, 489.

⁵⁴⁷ “UNESCO Director-General Condemns Murder of Sri Lankan Journalist Dharmeratnam Sivaram “Taraki”,” *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)*, last modified May 5, 2005, last accessed April 4, 2015. <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=18849&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>

⁵⁴⁸ “Daily Mirror,” last accessed November 14, 2012.

<<http://www.dailymirror.lk>>

information density. We note that various social networking platforms are embedded into the website (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds), which diffuses the online presence of dailymirror.lk even further. Node linkage exploration results indicate that moderators of news and community based websites characteristically link in to the website.

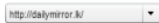
Figure 5.6 <http://dailymirror.lk/>



Dailymirror.lk Neighbours⁵⁴⁹

| Referees <i>(Nodes that cite http://dailymirror.lk/)</i> | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by http://dailymirror.lk/)</i> | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://dailymirror.lk/)</i> |
|--|--|---|
| 96 | 2 | 3 |

⁵⁴⁹ Dailymirror.lk Corpus Node Exploration.
<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=71&map=58&node=139§ion=26>>



⁵⁵⁰ “Sri Lanka Guardian,” last accessed November 14, 2012.
<<http://www.srilankaguardian.org>>

result of escalated violence within the region. Such creative and expressive forms of politics taking place online show the Internet's instrumental utility in enabling a platform to highlight visually the plight of ordinary people.

Figure 5.8 <http://srilankaguardian.org/>

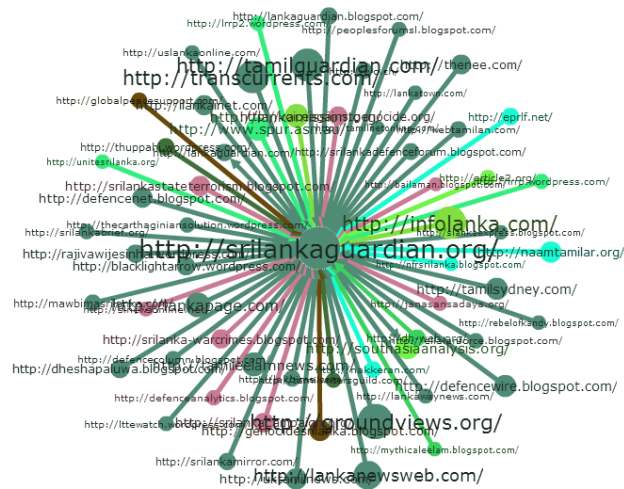


Srilankaguardian.org Neighbours⁵⁵¹

| Referees <i>(Nodes that cite http://srilankaguardian.org/)</i> | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by http://srilankaguardian.org/)</i> | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://srilankaguardian.org/)</i> |
|--|--|---|
| 60 | 2 | 3 |

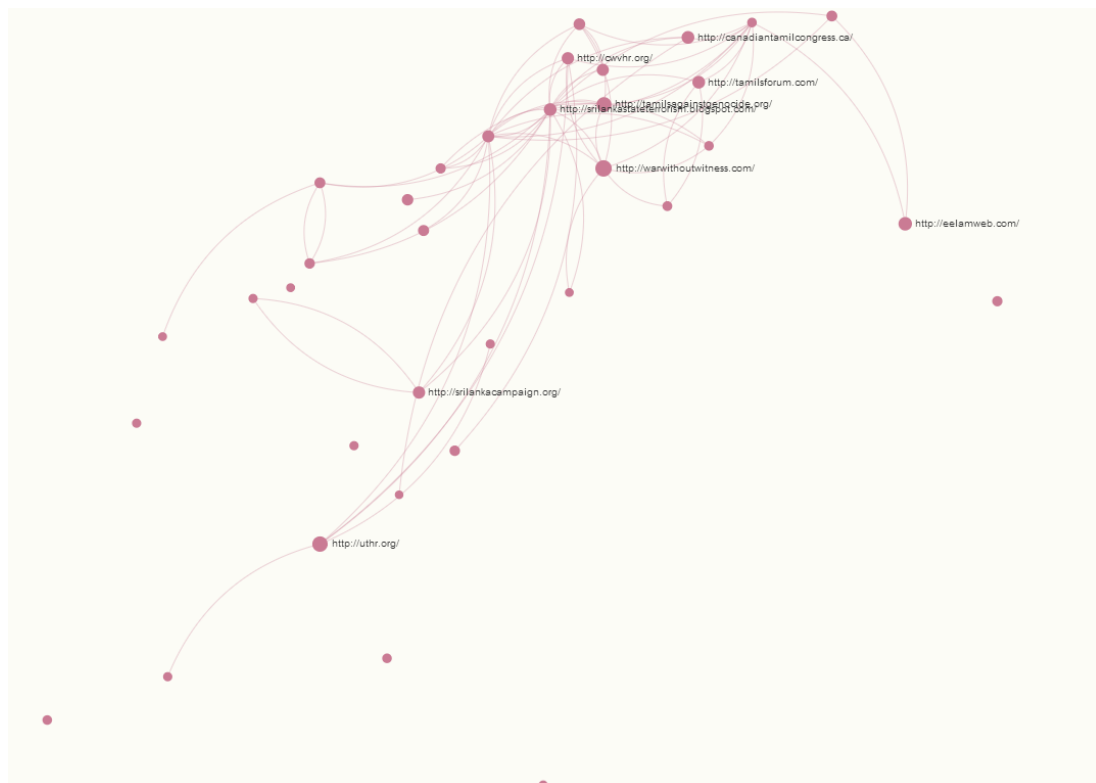
⁵⁵¹ Srilankaguardian.org Corpus Node Exploration.
<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=71&map=58&node=166§ion=26>>

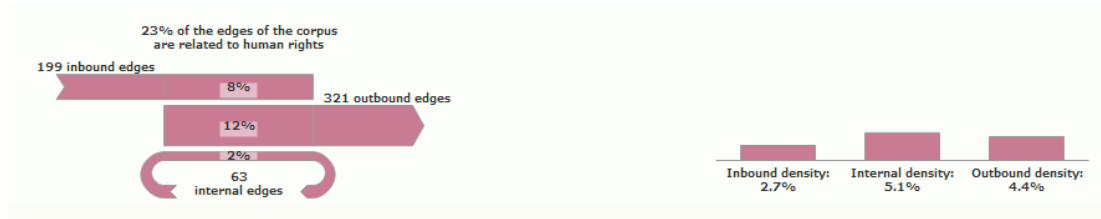
Figure 5.9 srilankaguardian.org Node Linkage Exploration



5.3.3 Tamil Corpus - Raising Awareness of Human Rights Violations

Figure 5.10 Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity - Human Rights





Representing 14% (35 nodes) of all corpus activity nodes, the map above is isolated for human rights-based node linkages.⁵⁵² Nodes cluster at the top of the corpus, and if compared against the Tamil activity map, maintain visible linkages with news-based nodes (left cluster). Human rights-based nodes are internally dense (5.1%), meaning internal linkages are greater than those flowing inbound or outbound. Linkages stemming from human rights-based nodes characteristically employ Tamil specific rights-based grammar. While internally dense, outbound flows are equally notable and significantly ‘in deficit’ (inbound 2.7% < outbound 4.4%). Moderators of human rights based websites substantiate claims through topical newsworthy affairs, which in the collective Tamil narrative focus on grievances experienced in the North East. Claims rooted in human rights-based discourse serve as a point of discussion and mobilisation for the transnational Tamil community. To gain a more detailed understanding of how these narratives link Tamil virtual space, the following data analysis considers the utility of human rights based nodes in bridging various sets of corpus activities.

⁵⁵² Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity - Human Rights. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5§ion=26&value=human%2Brights>>

Figure 5.11 Tamil Corpus Human Rights Hyperlink Flow (edges)

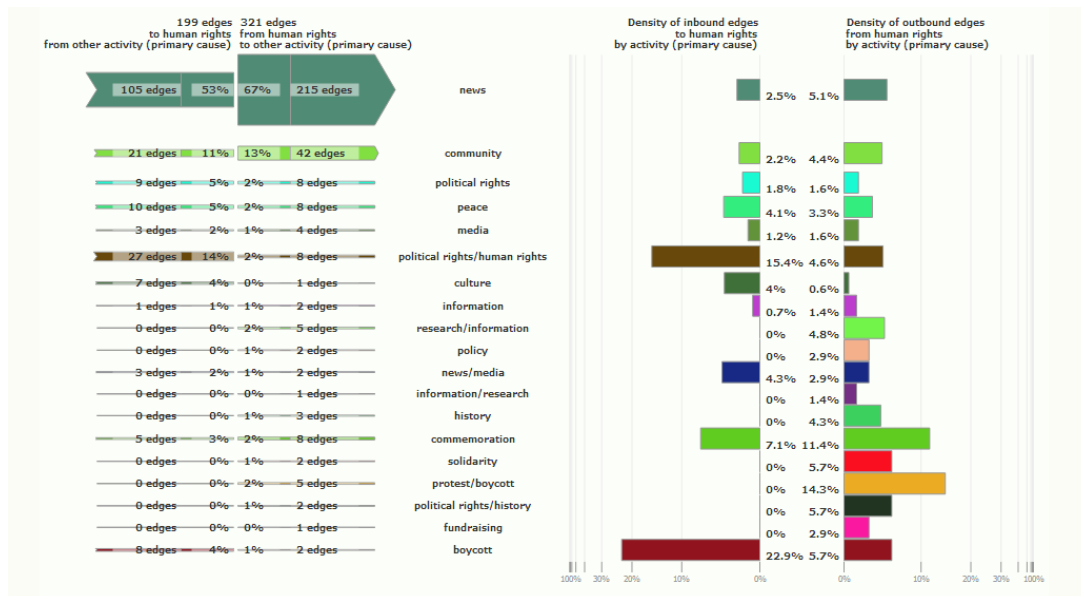


Figure 5.11 provides a more detailed account of external flows linking to and from human rights-based nodes. With a greater number of linkages flowing outward, human rights-based nodes maintain an ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relationship with news (321 links) and community (42 links) based activity nodes. In total, this accounts for 363 outbound links, which is considerably greater than inbound flow (126 links). These network statistics indicate that human rights claims are highly dependent on bottom up news updates that report on issues involving the transnational community and North East Sri Lanka. This is important because it draws systematic attention to connecting the local and the international to form global diaspora politics—something that would not be successfully captured by traditional state-centric approaches that view the Internet technologies in terms of instrumental utility.

Informing the boundaries of Tamil virtual space, linkages between human rights, news and community-based nodes are significant to the overall corpus network flow structure. As previously mentioned, although human rights account for only 14% of total nodes, this subset maintains a link presence over some 21% of the corpus. Corpus hyperlink flow statistics indicate that in maintaining a deep-seated online presence, human rights-based nodes strengthen their claims by linking into influential external activity subsets. Human

rights-based nodes most frequently cite external nodes belonging to news and community activity subsets, of which eight are noted key corpus authorities.

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside human rights that are cited by the most nodes in human rights

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM human rights |
|--|------------------------------------|
| http://tamilnet.com/ (news) | 20 |
| http://dailymirror.lk/ (news) | 12 |
| http://hindu.com/ (news) | 10 |
| http://hindustantimes.com/ (news) | 10 |
| http://groundviews.org/ (news) | 9 |
| http://tamilnation.org/ (community) | 9 |
| http://transcurrents.com/ (news) | 8 |
| http://sangam.org/ (community) | 8 |
| http://srilankaguardian.org/ (news) | 8 |
| http://tamilcanadian.com/ (community) | 7 |

Moderators of websites that focus on human rights seek to validate their online presence by linking in and expanding on timely issues rooted in newsworthy community affairs. For this reason unresolved grievances remain well-interwoven throughout Tamil virtual space.

Updates on the socio-political realities affecting people located in countries of settlement are often complemented with headline international news. In the Tamil case, this most often includes updates on international governing bodies like the UN, to which many human rights-based appeals have been directed.

Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside human rights that are cited by the most nodes in human rights

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM human rights |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| http://warwithoutwitness.com/ | 7 |
| http://tamilsagainstgenocide.org/ | 6 |
| http://uthr.org/ | 5 |
| http://cwvhr.org/ | 4 |
| http://canadiantamilcongress.ca/ | 4 |
| http://pucl.org/ | 4 |
| http://tamilsforum.com/ | 3 |
| http://voiceagainstgenocide.org/ | 3 |
| http://achrweb.org/ | 3 |
| http://ncet.no/ | 3 |

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside human rights that are cited by the most nodes in other activity

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://warwithoutwitness.com/ | 18 |
| http://uthr.org/ | 17 |
| http://tamilsagainstgenocide.org/ | 14 |
| http://eelamweb.com/ | 14 |
| http://srilankastateterrorism.blogspot.com/ | 11 |
| http://tamilsforum.com/ | 10 |
| http://canadiantamilcongress.ca/ | 9 |
| http://boycottsrilanka.com/ | 9 |
| http://srilankacampaign.org/ | 9 |
| http://cwvhr.org/ | 8 |

Subgraph and representative authorities provide a more detailed account of node subset link distributions. Guiding online engagements, nodes often use community-specific rights-based (war, genocide) grammar as distinct domain names. To link online activities to the offline environment, emphasis is placed on connecting unresolved past grievances with current political affairs taking place across various countries of settlement. Building on themes of

trauma, websites focusing on human rights function as virtual springboards for Tamil grievances to aggregate and mobilise on a much more public scale. As indicated by subset authorities, online activities reinforce sentiments of transnational unity between audiences by pinning community grievances to value-driven democratic perspectives. Domestic and international governing bodies often serve as the framework upon which moderators structure and justify grievance claims.

Figure 5.12 <http://tamilsagainstgenocide.org/>



Focusing on the human rights violations, tamilsagainstgenocide.org⁵⁵³ provides public access to grievance specific community resources. Allegations of war crimes and genocide are substantiated through evidence-based research publications, all of which are available for download. The website also provides updates on Tamil advocacy networks and ongoing litigation processes. This is noted in the website interface shown in Figure 5.11, which provides detailed information on complaints forwarded to the UK Border Agency and the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of the Tamil community.

⁵⁵³ "Tamils Against Genocide," last accessed November 10, 2012.
<<http://www.tamilsagainstgenocide.org/>>

Content, while Tamil specific, varies in scope (domestic, regional, international) with human rights serving as the overarching frame upon which moderators introduce claims that deserve greater attention from international bodies. This is most visible in the extensive use of rights-based grammar throughout the website interface (genocide, war crimes, human rights, police). Most notable is the image of a distressed woman surrounded by what are only assumed to be photographs of displaced Tamils. Audiences are also prompted to support online efforts, with calls to “donate to fight” against human rights violations. We can clearly see that the moderators of this website aim to reframe Tamil grievances as important issues in world politics.

Appeals for audience engagement, while framed by human rights, vary between subset nodes—a variance that can only be properly assessed through tracing and capturing online network linkages through Big Data analyses. Online activities, while public, have different offline focal points. Moderators of *tamilsagainstgenocide.org* direct the majority of Tamil grievances towards the greater international community. While community-specific, *tamilsagainstgenocide.org* lacks a physical grounding, and does not seek to link in or cater specifically to the general Tamil diaspora. Instead, emphasis is placed on publicising the grave human rights violations experienced by Tamils in the North East and the lack of international recognition (or outrage for that matter) of these atrocities.

This differs significantly from *canadiantamilcongress.ca*, which functions as a self-proclaimed online extension of the Tamil community in Canada. As a conflict-driven migrant population, political grievances and past traumas associated with human rights violations are well networked into the overarching collective diasporic identity for Canadian Tamils. Calls for justice and the reconciliation of past human rights violations are framed through what are largely regarded as Canadian values (freedom, democracy, democratic governances, human rights, rule of law).⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁴ The promotion of Canadian values - freedom, democracy, democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law - lies at the heart of Canada's foreign policy.

See: “Democracy and Human Rights,” *Government of Canada*, last accessed July 15, 2014.

<<http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/eu-ue/policies-politiques/democracy-democratie.aspx?lang=eng>>

Figure 5.13 <http://canadiantamilcongress.ca/>



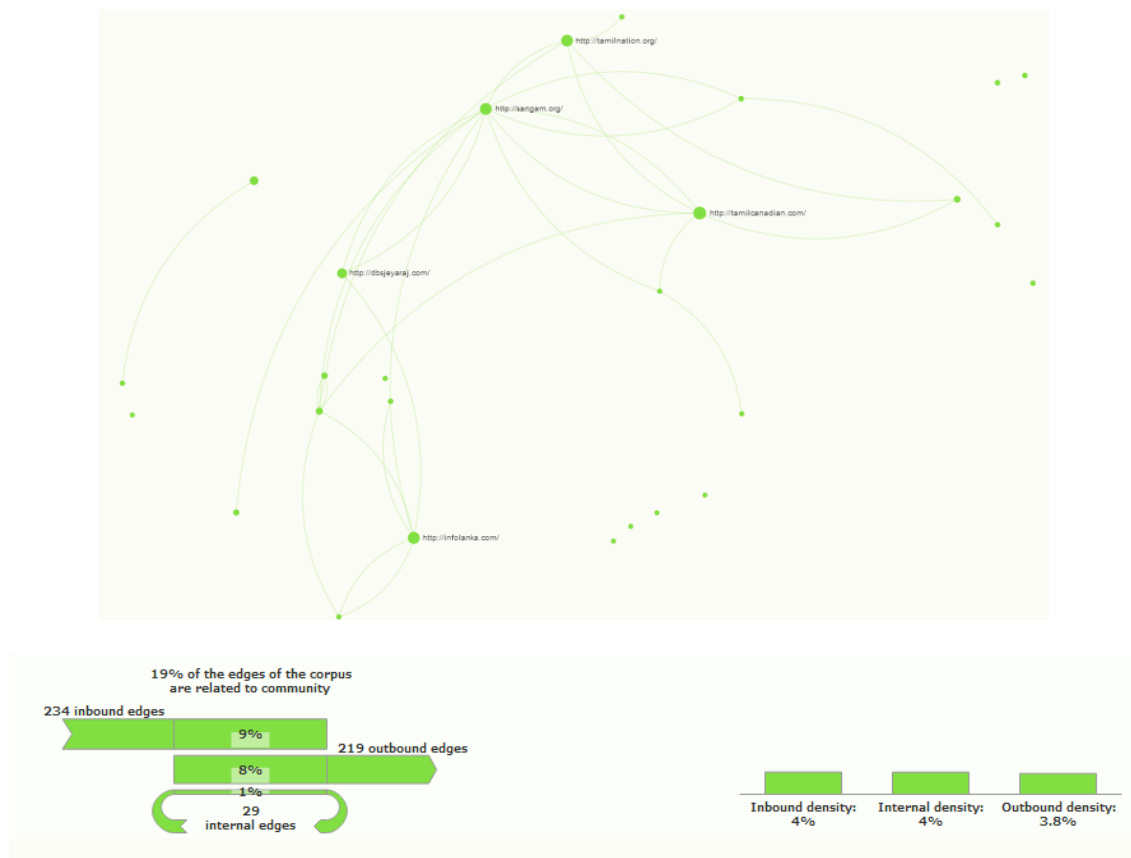
The Canadian Tamil Congress⁵⁵⁵ (CTC) proclaims itself as the “voice of Tamil Canadians.” Reference to Canada is explicit in the red maple leaf emblem, and website headings are presented in Tamil and both Canada’s official languages, English and French. Online activities are specific to local Canadian populations, but are framed through broader identity-based community narratives that are more likely to resonate and connect with Tamils around the world and point to empowering more expressive forms of identity politics. Audiences are invited to inform themselves of the traumas experienced during the forced exile and mass displacement that occurred in the 1980s (Silenced Voices). Headlines involving the Government of Canada are presented as they pertain to the local Tamils (Canada’s stance of intervention, appeals to the Supreme Court). Grievances associated with the anti-Tamil pogroms of 1983 (‘Black July’) remain etched in the minds of many Tamil Canadian families and are commemorated annually through various events organised by the CTC. As seen on

⁵⁵⁵ “Canadian Tamil Congress,” last accessed November 6, 2012.
<www.canadiantamilcongress.ca>

the website interface, audiences are invited to stay informed on the various remembrance locally-organised activities. Audiences are also informed of notable charity donations made on behalf of the greater Tamil diaspora (walk-a-thon raises \$45,000 for charity). This type of positive contribution helps reinforce the Tamil community's positive contribution to Canadian society and provides a more complete and representative picture of on-the-ground engagements beyond conflict.

5.3.4 Tamil Corpus - Expanding Transnational Community Linkages

Figure 5.14 Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity - Community



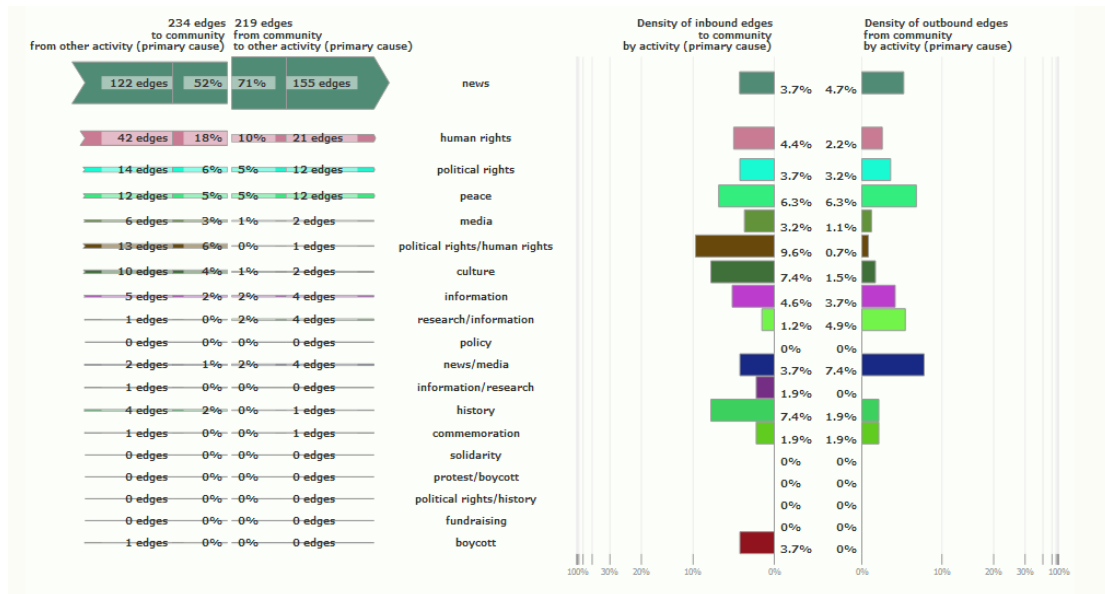
Accounting for 11% (27 nodes) of all corpus activity, Figure 5.14 shows a more detailed account of community-based online activities.⁵⁵⁶ Lacking dense cluster pockets, node linkages are spread throughout the corpus. The isolation highlights sangam.org,

⁵⁵⁶ Tamil Corpus - Type of Activity - Community.

<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5§ion=26&value=community>>

tamilcanadian.com, and tamilnation.org as key subset authorities. Subset nodes are minimally ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound), with inbound (4%), internal (4%) and outbound (3.8%) link densities statistically comparable. Corpus flow statistics are presented below, and provide a more detailed account of community node linkages as they relate to external activities.

Figure 5.15 Tamil Corpus Community Hyperlink Flow (edges)



Community nodes maintain complex linkages with external activity subsets. Flow linkages serve to reinforce the conceptual boundaries of online Tamil engagements. Contemporary Tamil advocacy networks remain fixated on grievance narratives, which differ from community based website nodes that largely focus on newsworthy identity-based political affairs. Community websites maintain an ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relationship with news based nodes (155 links). Subset nodes conversely maintain an ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship with human rights based nodes (42 links). These statistics highlight the way that community-based websites function as a network bridge between news dissemination and human rights advocacy.

Online community-based activities are reflective, and stay relevant through timely updates on news and events of interest on both local and global scales. Moderators of human rights-based websites seek to reaffirm and validate the veracity of grievances by linking into online representations of the transnational Tamil community. As indicated by subset

authorities, understandings of community are multifaceted, flexible and can indeed vary. Online representations of the Tamil community may, for example, cater to specific countries of settlement, dense population clusters or conversely function as collective platform for the greater transnational community.

Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside community that are cited by the most nodes in community

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM community |
|---|---------------------------------|
| http://sangam.org/ | 7 |
| http://tamilnation.org/ | 5 |
| http://tamilcanadian.com/ | 4 |
| http://info.lanka.com/ | 3 |
| http://lankalibrary.com/ | 2 |
| http://fetna.org/ | 1 |
| http://lankamission.org/ | 1 |
| http://dbsjeyaraj.com/ | 1 |
| http://auroville.org/ | 1 |
| http://sinhalaya.com/ | 1 |

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside community that are cited by the most nodes in other activity

(primary cause)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://tamilcanadian.com/ | 39 |
| http://infolanka.com/ | 36 |
| http://tamilnation.org/ | 32 |
| http://sangam.org/ | 31 |
| http://dbsjeyaraj.com/ | 26 |
| http://lankamission.org/ | 19 |
| http://lankalibrary.com/ | 10 |
| http://2tamil.com/ | 9 |
| http://sinhale.wordpress.com/ | 7 |
| http://sinhalaya.com/ | 7 |

Subgraph and representative authorities provide a more detailed account of community-based node linkages. Moderators of corpus authorities like infolanka.com and lankalibrary.com seek to provide audiences with open access to community-specific informative resources. In such cases we can see that the web serves as an alternative networked platform for otherwise dispersed populations to access Tamil-specific reference material. This differs significantly

from moderators of community-based websites that explicitly use the web to support transnational identity-based linkages between online and offline environments.

Figure 5.16 <http://tamilcanadian.com/>



Proclaimed as the “Tamils’ True Voice”, tamilcanadian.com⁵⁵⁷ is the only key corpus authority to focus strictly on the Tamil diaspora community.⁵⁵⁸ As seen in Figure 5.16, in an attempt to strengthen sentiments of shared collective identity, moderators inform audiences of timely Tamil-specific newsworthy affairs. Online activities are directed to Canadian (Toronto based) community members in particular. Audiences are updated daily on weather conditions in Toronto, Canadian currency exchange rates and news stories affecting everyday Tamil Canadians. The website also provides access to a Toronto based business directory including a variety of Tamil establishments and organisations (examples include healthcare services, real estate, catering and dining). In this regard tamilcanadian.com serves to reinforce and strengthen offline representations of the local Tamil Canadian community.

⁵⁵⁷ “Tamil Canadian,” last accessed November 14, 2012.

<<http://www.tamilcanadian.com/news/>>

⁵⁵⁸ See Top 10 (authoritative) Tamil diaspora websites.

Web activities also link in to broader grievance narratives, and emphasise the human rights violations that remain neglected by key international bodies (UN failures). The Human Rights subheading on the top of the homepage provides detailed information on multiple grievance claims that have yet to be officially addressed (disappearances, torture, propaganda, refugees). Moderators also provide a “memory of the day”, where audiences are informed of key instances (news) of human rights violations that have taken place in the past. Tamilcanadian.com highlights the idea that supporting local community awareness can serve to strengthen identity-based connections between online (local) and offline (transnational) environments, once again pointing to new and more empowered forms of identity politics. Cyberspace has most recently decentralised the conceptual boundaries of the transnational community, by enabling Tamil formations to take shape online (beyond territory). Focusing on the transnational Tamil community, tamilnation.org, advocates for the strengthening of the Tamil nation via cyberspace.

Figure 5.17 <http://tamilnation.co/>
(mirror site of tamilnation.org)



Audiences immediately take note of the disclaimer at the top of the homepage⁵⁵⁹ which explains the administrative hurdles that have led to the website assuming alternative domain registration (tamilnation.org to tamilnation.co). The struggle for statehood in the North East (Tamil Eelam) provides the context through which nationalist sentiments are presented and expanded online. While still in its preliminary drafting phases, the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) has recently emerged as an additional online-based representation for the greater Tamil nation.⁵⁶⁰

5.4 The Tamil Blogosphere: Alternative News Perspectives

The above findings provide a snapshot of Tamil virtual activities. In maintaining node linkages, Internet web 2.0 technologies rely on dynamic user-centred online collaborations which, in their aggregated and finite composition, cannot be accounted for by triadic assumptions or static methodological approaches. Users employ a variety of read-write audio/visual formats in their online interactions. As a result, particular emphasis was placed on distinguishing between conventional websites (characterised by thematic focus and splash style imagery) and blog interfaces (expressive web logs mimicking personal journals). Often informed by personal experiences, blogs empower individuals with an open platform to publicly negotiate and debate timely world affairs at their discretion. For Tamil activists, this often includes the discussion of contentious politics and grievances believed to affect the greater transnational community. These practices and performances are increasingly important sources that are neglected or have been given little attention by older approaches, as argued in Chapters 1–3. Beyond online activity, corpus nodes were also classified by type of website,⁵⁶¹ allowing for a more detailed visual representation of the Tamil blogosphere. As discussed in the methodology section of this study, blogs were largely identified through

⁵⁵⁹ “Tamil Nation,” last accessed November 16, 2012.

<<http://www.tamilnation.co> />

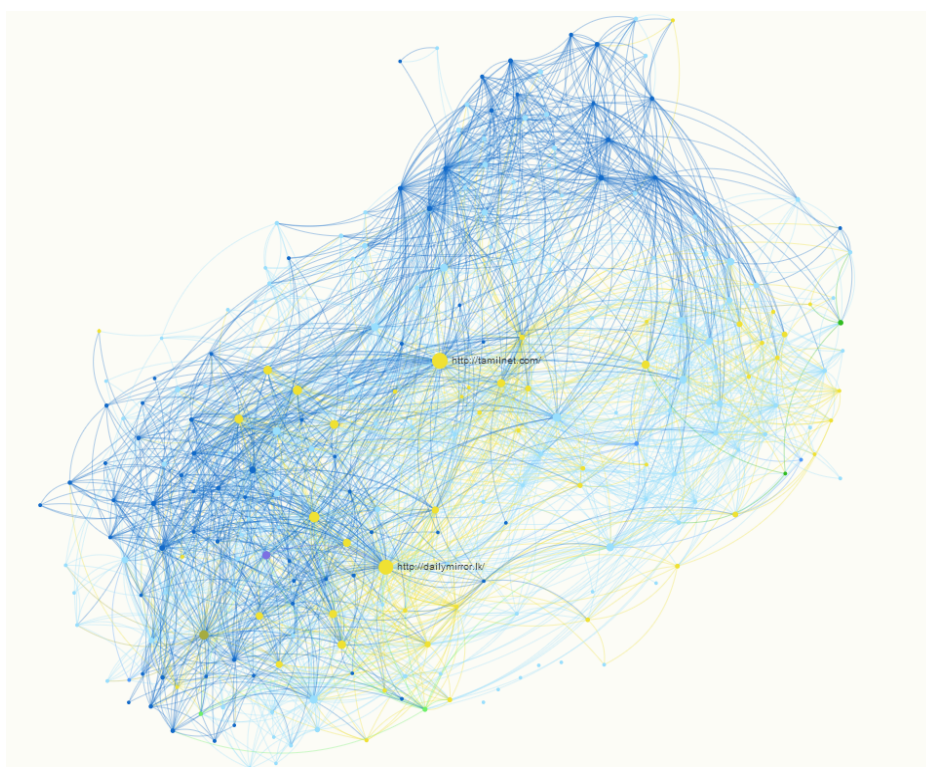
⁵⁶⁰ This website was developed after the crawls were conducted. While discussed in greater detail in the final section of this chapter, it did not exist when I first began the online crawls.

⁵⁶¹ Nodes were classified by type of website, actor, activity, secondary activity, language, location. Type of website classifications: site, blog, news group, forum site, social network.

domain references due to anonymity. Common blog interfaces include Wordpress, Blogspot and Tumblr (which appear in the website domain name).

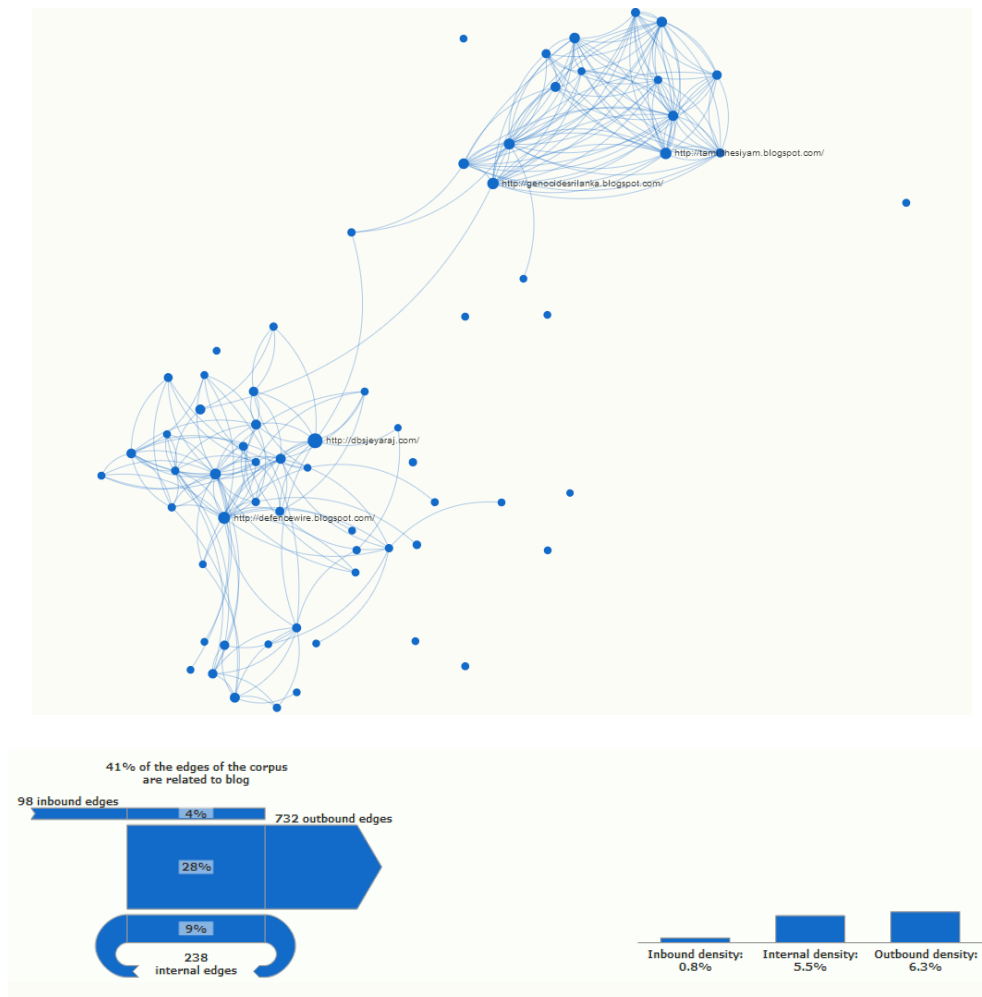
Figure 5.18 presents the Tamil corpus as classified by website type.⁵⁶² Blog nodes form clusters at the top and left of the corpus. Linkages extend outwards on the right side of the corpus and maintain connections with conventional websites. When compared against the Tamil activity map, we note that the majority of blogs focus on news and themes of human rights. The Tamil blogosphere as isolated below, provides a more detailed account of network clusters linking within the corpus. Corpus statistics indicate that blogs account for some 27% (66 blogs) of all Tamil nodes.⁵⁶³ With 41% of corpus nodes maintaining linkages with blog nodes, the Tamil blogosphere sustains significant connections with external website nodes (see type of website classification). Characteristic of most blogging networks, corpus statistics highlight a disproportionate number of links flowing outward (731 outbound linkages).

Figure 5.18 Tamil Corpus - Type of Website - Blog



⁵⁶² Tamil Corpus - Type of Website.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3§ion=26>>

⁵⁶³ Tamil Corpus - Type of Website – Blog.< <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3§ion=27&value=blog>>
Conventional websites and news group sites account for 49% and 20% nodes respectively.



Corpus statistics indicate that the majority of blogs (66 nodes) focus on news (50%, 33 nodes), human rights (15%, 10 nodes), political rights (8%, 5 nodes) and community-based activities (6%, 4 nodes).

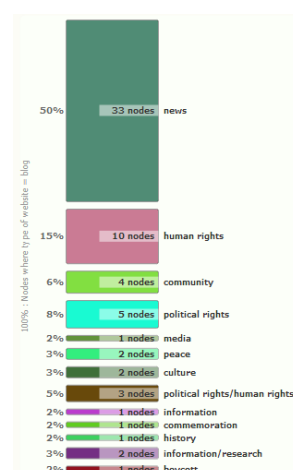


Figure 5.19 Corpus Blog Statistics

Corpus statistics highlight news and human rights blogs as instrumental diffusion hubs within greater Tamil virtual space. While blogs do not carry authority status in the corpus, they are essential to reaffirming, expressing and imagining narratives of struggle online.

Diffusing Hubs

Nodes inside news that cite the most nodes in other activity (primary cause)

| Node name | Outbound edges TO other activity (primary cause) |
|---|--|
| http://defencetamils.blogspot.com/ | 30 |
| http://uktamilnews.com/ | 29 |
| http://tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com/ | 25 |
| http://suthumaathukal.blogspot.com/ | 20 |
| http://lankaweb.com/ | 14 |
| http://seithy.com/ | 13 |
| http://srilanka-videos.blogspot.com/ | 13 |
| http://eelavarkural.blogspot.com/ | 12 |
| http://groundviews.org/ | 10 |
| http://defencewire.blogspot.com/ | 10 |

Compared to traditional websites, news-based blogs are more personalised and often reflect the human rights abuses experienced by Tamils in the North East. Diffusing news hubs tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com and eelavarkural.blogspot.com⁵⁶⁴ pull content from both English and Tamil online resources. We note that both blogs feature fallen LTTE leader ‘VP’ in their website banners. By referencing the LTTE, these blogs present themselves as unofficial information portals for Eelam-specific updates. Audiences seeking ‘English News’ on tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com are sent to mutually linked virtual neighbour, genocidesrilanka.blogspot.co.uk. This highlights that while micro level website content may vary, news-based blogs frame their web presence through the alleged abuses experienced by Tamils in the North East. Most important, these blogs show that online platforms also can serve to strengthen and reinforce themes of violent struggle. We recall that this is not the case for prominent websites (like tamilnet.com) that actively strive to gain mainstream legitimacy in world affairs, and therefore avoid publicly expressing admiration for the LTTE or ‘VP’. Such findings are only possible through fine-tooth systematic explorations, and sophisticated Big Data methodology that allows for nuances within the dataset.

Figure 5.20 <http://eelavarkural.blogspot.co.uk/>



⁵⁶⁴ “Genocide Sri Lanka,” (Blog), last accessed May 20, 2014.

<<http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.co.uk/>> <<http://eelavarkural.blogspot.co.uk/>> <
<http://tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com/>>



Figure 5.21 <http://tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com/>

‘English News’ leads to:

Figure 5.22 <http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.co.uk/>



Human rights-based blogs exhibit bridging capabilities by structuring their web presence through conflict-specific engagements. Website content is noted to focus on raising awareness of the alleged war crimes and genocide that occurred during the final stages of the Sri Lankan civil war. As diffusion hubs, human rights blogs provide linked access to various audio/visual media including Channel 4’s ground breaking investigative documentary, “Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields” (broadcast in 2011).

Diffusing Hubs

Nodes inside human rights
that cite the most nodes in other activity (*primary cause*)

| Node name | Outbound edges TO other activity (primary cause) |
|---|--|
| http://slnewsonline.net/ | 41 |
| http://srilankastateterrorism.blogspot.com/ | 33 |
| http://defenceanalytics.blogspot.com/ | 28 |
| http://srilanka-warcrimes.blogspot.com/ | 28 |
| http://emmavar.blogspot.com/ | 24 |
| http://eelamaravar.blogspot.com/ | 20 |
| http://srilankacampaign.org/ | 18 |
| http://bailaman.blogspot.com/ | 13 |
| http://tchr.net/ | 11 |
| http://achrweb.org/ | 10 |

Website banners from srilankastateterrorism.blogspot.co.uk and srilanka-warcrimes.blogspot.co.uk portray governing authorities (a Sinhalese majority) as the key aggressors of the conflict. Violence against innocent Tamils is referenced through images of suffering children and civilian brutalities. Appealing to the international audiences, srilanka-warcrimes.blogspot.co.uk includes an image of Buddhist monks publicly desecrating a

Norwegian flag.⁵⁶⁵ Such images suggest Sinhalese nationalists (including the National Bhikku Front) as key spoilers to peace across various regions.⁵⁶⁶

Figure 5.23 <http://srilankastateterrorism.blogspot.co.uk/>



Figure 5.24 <http://srilanka-warcrimes.blogspot.co.uk/>



In mobilising calls for justice, moderators of these diffusing blogs are noted to employ Tamil specific ‘rights-based’ discourse throughout their online engagements. Domain addresses for example, strategically reference forms of political violence (defence, terrorism, war crimes, genocide) as a means to raise international awareness of the continued abuses committed by the oppressive Sri Lankan authorities. It is important to acknowledge the structural role diffusing blogs play in connecting nodes and streamlining content throughout online Tamil networks. External outbound linkages from the subset indicate blogs to maintain notable connections with key corpus authorities such as tamilnet.com and dailymirror.lk. These

⁵⁶⁵ “Buddhist monks burn Norwegian flag,” *Tamil Net*, last accessed May 7, 2014.

<<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=8036>>

“Sinhala nationalists burn Norway's national flag,” *Tamil Net*, last accessed May 7, 2014.

<<http://au.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=12843>>

⁵⁶⁶ “Sri Lanka war state terrorism,” (Blog), last accessed May 7, 2014.

<<http://srilankastateterrorism.blogspot.co.uk/>>

“Sri Lanka War Crimes,” (Blog), last accessed May 7, 2014.

<<http://srilanka-warcrimes.blogspot.co.uk/>>

trends underline the bridging capabilities of blogs in disseminating content, which helps to enhance the overall network reach and relational influence of corpus authorities.

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside blog that are cited by the most nodes in blog

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM blog |
|--|----------------------------|
| http://tamilnet.com/ (news group) | 37 |
| http://dailymirror.lk/ (news group) | 36 |
| http://lankaweb.com/ (site soc med) | 25 |
| http://srilankaguardian.org/ (news group) | 24 |
| http://groundviews.org/ (news group) | 23 |
| http://hindu.com/ (news group) | 20 |
| http://lankaenews.com/ (news group) | 18 |
| http://tamilnation.org/ (site) | 18 |
| http://transcurrents.com/ (site) | 17 |
| http://sangam.org/ (site) | 17 |

Highlight above: corpus authorities (see Top 10 (authoritative) Tamil diaspora Websites

5.5 Contextualising Tamil Virtual Space

In this section, I present results from the web-based content analysis to draw attention to the key themes that dominate contemporary Tamil identity politics online. A sample of 40 websites corpus nodes⁵⁶⁷ were used to provide a more communicative-led approach to the narratives, themes and issue agendas that make up online ‘diasporic’ representations. The results suggest that Tamil collective identity connects conditions on the ground to world affairs through increasingly liquid reflections on past migration, violent struggles and homeland injustices. In the following section I use actor respondents to explain that the conflict and trauma experienced in the North East serve as identity-based political bonds for the transnational Tamil community even in the post-2009 rebuilding phase.

Frequently employed words in the Tamil Corpus

| | |
|----------------|------|
| War | 1263 |
| Human rights | 621 |
| Crimes | 510 |
| Reconciliation | 401 |
| Military | 389 |
| Nation | 371 |
| Killings | 322 |
| Diaspora | 231 |
| Justice | 164 |
| Freedom | 126 |
| Genocide | 104 |

⁵⁶⁷ See Appendix A: Content Analysis – Sample Websites.



Figure 5.25 Common Words Found in the Tamil Corpus

After 25 years of civil war, the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 introduced a period of uncertainty for the Tamil nation. Web-based content analysis shows that online narratives focus on raising international awareness of human rights violations that occurred in the final stages of the conflict. With the transnational Tamil community now at the forefront of online advocacy (keyword: diaspora), Tamil virtual space serves two main functions. First, as a mobilising structure, web 2.0 online platforms are used to more efficiently draw attention to the trauma that ordinary Tamils have experienced by Sri Lankan authorities. Appeals for international justice employ a rights-based approach in an effort to gain wider recognition and support from international bodies like the UN (key words: human rights, reconciliation, war crimes, justice, genocide). People empowered with these connective resource opportunities are now able to communicate and share their local surroundings with fewer institutional obstacles (state-censorship, fear of blacklisting, imprisonment) than ever before. I argue that through rights-based discourse, Tamil grievances and identity/interest-based calls for self-determination are becoming decentralised. These issue agendas have a greater potential to mobilise as part of global politics.

Secondly and beyond instrumentally supportive functions, user-centred online platforms enable new understandings of Tamil Eelam (key word: nation) to take form. Online Tamil identity-based political bonds virtually transcend physical, territorial or state-based containers, and cannot be fully explained by the triadic model or approaches that bind identity to territory. The post 2009 LTTE leadership vacuum has led to an influx of online representations that claim to speak on behalf of the Tamil diaspora politics. Although the integrity of these proclamations varies, I argue that in their aggregates, these organisational network shifts will preserve sentiments of Tamil nationhood for future (increasingly tech-based) generations. In the current rebuilding phase, the web increasingly serves as a focal hub for contemporary actors involved in Tamil diaspora politics to (re)engage more strategically with the struggle for self-determination from the ‘bottom up’, beyond the legacy of the LTTE. As detailed in actor interviews below, even though the tactics may have changed, narratives of struggle remain a primary source of unity for the transnational Tamil community, the only key difference being that the online representation provides a far more efficient network for those narratives.

5.6 Actor Reflections: Upholding Tamil Collective Identity Online

5.6.1 Solidarity through Narratives of Homeland Struggle

Tamil virtual space builds off the trauma of past events in the North East of Sri Lanka and present-day experiences of the transnational community across various countries of settlement. Conflict-driven migration patterns continue to play an important role in shaping the ways in which Tamil actors approach online platforms; but as either a resource hub or a tool of empowerment, these identity infused networks are strengthening sentiments of collective unity between scattered populations. Actors are noted to increasingly memorialise key traumas online, treating the web as a site for commemoration in itself, setting up virtual archive museums or archiving grievances and the ethos of struggle in addition to coordinating memorial events on the ground in a variety of dispersed locations.

Recognising the violent conditions of migration as a source of cohesion for Tamil Canadians, a founding member of the Toronto based virtual archive blackjuly83.com explained, “we have a common ground, there is this commonality of finding a better place

for the community.”⁵⁶⁸ A defining moment in contemporary Tamil history, the anti-Tamil pogroms of July 1983, remembered as Black July, remain well entrenched in the consciousness of many first generation migrants. Black July marks a period of mass exodus, where in response to increased levels persecution and violence, many Tamils began to seek refuge in the west (Canada in particular). Perpetuating narratives of struggle in countries of settlement, the same founding member explained the impact of Black July in the following way:

“for a person who is trying to understand the Tamil community, 83 [Black July 1983] is a critical point when people left Sri Lanka. Why they left, why they continue to leave, it’s all there.”⁵⁶⁹

Building on past narratives of struggle, organisations such as the Tamil Youth Organisation (TYO) make concerted efforts to fuse past traumas of displacement with present day calls for Tamil Eelam in the North East. A member of the UK based chapter of the TYO noted the role of conflict-driven migration in reinforcing sentiments of nationhood between dispersed Tamils and those in Sri Lanka, commenting “after 1983 it’s refugees mainly, the majority are involved in the struggle back home.”⁵⁷⁰ In his reflections, the same interviewee explained narratives of struggle as “a natural thing”, stating that “every Tamil is a Tamil nationalist to some degree.”⁵⁷¹

Many British Tamil organisations marked the 30th anniversary of ‘Black July’ through coordinated commemorative rallies and protest activities, in which the web was a crucial organising factor. The anniversary also served as an opportunity for actors to revive transnational appeals for national liberation in the North East. One such event was the “Free Tamil Eelam Global Campaign” (July 23–27, 2013), a remembrance relay widely publicised on the TYOUK website.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁸ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁶⁹ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁷⁰ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁵⁷¹ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁵⁷² “TYOUK Free Tamil Eelam Global Campaign,” *TYOUK*, last accessed May 10, 2014.

<http://www.tyouk.org/?page_id=1530&event_id=3>

Figure 5.26 Free Tamil Eelam Global Campaign (TYOUK)



Online audiences were invited to participate in the London-based relay and show their support for the Tamil struggle through the following plea: “please join us as the next generation intensifies the national liberation struggle on the 30th anniversary of the Black July genocidal massacres.”⁵⁷³ The TYOUK made significant efforts to advertise the campaign to youth populations in particular; employing Tamil-specific graphics (barbed wire, protestors, the Tamil Eelam flag, a map of the North East) and colours (black and red) throughout their online outreach strategy. These indicate that the web represents expressive forms of politics—a political cyber domain enabling appeals to emotions that do not gain as much attention from triadic state-centric approaches.

Using the web as a platform to support mobilisation activities, the Free Tamil Eelam Global Campaign was complemented with protests organised by the British Tamil Forum.⁵⁷⁴ The Tamil Guardian, a leading London-based media organisation, simultaneously provided updates on the various commemorative activities taking place across the city. Headline stories included photographs of young British Tamils handing out leaflets in central London

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ “British Tamils Commemorate 30th Anniversary of Black July Anti-Tamil Pogrom,” *Tamils Forum*, last modified July 24, 2013, last accessed May 3, 2014.

<<http://tamilsforum.co.uk/2013/07/british-tamils-commemorate-30th-anniversary-of-black-july-anti-tamil-pogrom/>>

as well as the ongoing demonstrations being staged in front of 10 Downing Street.⁵⁷⁵ One such entry “30 years on from Black July 1983” provided audiences with an overview of the massacre including linked access to blackjuly83.com, a noteworthy virtual museum.⁵⁷⁶

Established by the Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC) in 2008, blackjuly83.com⁵⁷⁷ is a community-led online archive dedicated to remembering the survivors and victims of July 1983. The virtual museum has received much praise for providing community members with an accessible archive of previously “silenced voices.”⁵⁷⁸ In addition to survivor testimonials, the information repository also presents detailed timelines of the massacre, historical documents and information on local Toronto-based commemorative events.⁵⁷⁹ A founding member of the website explained:

“what we wanted to do was not to just talk about Black July, but talk about everything leading up to that. It kind of summarises [the tumultuous period] quite succinctly, so it allows someone to learn...it’s a resource to learn”.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁵ “British Tamils remember Black July,” *Tamil Guardian*, last modified July 23, 2013, last accessed May 3, 2014. <<http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=8374>>

⁵⁷⁶ “30 years on from Black July 1984,” *Tamil Guardian*, last modified July 23, 2013, last accessed May 3, 2014. <<http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=8373>>

⁵⁷⁷ “Black July,” last accessed May 3, 2014. <<http://www.blackjuly83.com/>>

⁵⁷⁸ Amarnath Amarasingam, “Black July: Remembering the 1983 Riots in Sri Lanka,” *Huffingtonpost.ca*, last modified September 22, 2011, last accessed May 3, 2014.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/amarnath-amarasingam/black-july-riots-sri-lanka-1983_b_897591.html>

⁵⁷⁹ “Remembering Silenced Voices,” *Black July 83*, last accessed May 3, 2014.

<<http://www.blackjuly83.com/index.htm>>

⁵⁸⁰ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

Figure 5.27 <http://www.blackjuly83.com/>



Prior to its launching, the CTC made significant efforts to publicise the virtual museum as a resource opportunity for Tamils to collectively preserve the memories of Black July. Calls for submissions were disseminated throughout Tamil virtual space by prominent diasporic organisations including the Association of Tamils of Sri Lanka in the USA (Ilankai Tamil Sangam).⁵⁸¹ A CTC press release dated May 8 2008, for example, was reposted on the Sangam website as “Black July Commemoration”, and provided audiences with the relevant contact information should they wish to contribute to the virtual museum.⁵⁸² Using this kind

⁵⁸¹ Ilankai Tamil Sangam was founded in 1977, and remains the oldest Tamil association in the USA. “Ilankai Tamil Sangam,” last accessed May 3, 2014.

<<http://sangam.org/about/>>

⁵⁸² “Black July Commemoration,” *Sangam*, last accessed May 4, 2014.

<http://sangam.org/2008/05/Black_July.php?uid=2910>

of approach, the Internet can be seen as a utility that empowers or creates new forms of diaspora politics

Built on the experiences of community elders, the interviewee from blackjuly83.com pointed to a considerable digital divide (based on scepticism) between older and younger generations. She explained that compared to younger generations, community elders were less technologically savvy, “the survivors, they’re not from this generation, they don’t have Twitter [and have less web based expertise].”⁵⁸³ In her reflections, she added “online is important” so “why not build stronger relations as a way to move forward?”⁵⁸⁴ In earlier chapters of this thesis I explained that the process of online involvement via the connective opportunities afforded through Internet web 2.0 technologies is comparatively low in cost, which is extremely empowering for ordinary (resource-poor) people no matter what their age. Online platforms enable Tamil activists to link more publicly and attach the events of July 1983 to current transnational politics. The same interviewee noted that in collecting survivor testimonials, community elders were sometimes hesitant to share their experiences in fear being exposed and/or punished:

“All of the stories we posted were handed in online, but we really had to go with connections who knew people...listen to them, document their story, have it published. They wanted to remain anonymous online, and worried that they would be targeted if they went home.”⁵⁸⁵

Although decades in the past, survivors of ‘Black July’ remain memorialised online; weaving into current political struggles for self-determination. In presenting memories of trauma online, actors vie to reawaken Tamil collective identity and emotional attachments to the North East. Sentiments of unity are streamlined through a common history – as told by community elders. The interviewee from blackjuly83.com clarified that while Tamil actors encourage youth engagement, they are equally mindful to not misrepresent the experiences of survivors. “I have to be careful, because I am representing the community. You don’t want to

⁵⁸³ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁸⁴ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁸⁵ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

censor everything, but you have to take note of what the majority feel, so it's a balancing act.”⁵⁸⁶

Virtual museums like blackjuly83.com demonstrate that Tamil grievances are being liquefied and preserved from the ‘bottom up’. Although neglected in classical triadic approaches, these online dynamics show that the web can indeed serve as a contemporary space for identity formation and community representation. Populations who may never have stepped foot in Sri Lanka are able to imagine the events of ‘Black July’ online. These empowering capabilities offer survivors a stage on which to share their stories, “a source of inspiration for others” dealing with similar grievances, whether Tamil or not.⁵⁸⁷ Extending the reach and applicability of ‘Black July’ to the cyber domain also reinforces the internal legacy of struggle beyond first and second generations. “The diaspora has gone through so much, they’ve been part of protests, they’ve seen before that their parents went through trauma...its affected [homeland struggles] I think every single Tamil one time or another.”⁵⁸⁸ Absorbing the experiences of their parents, second and third generation Tamils have assumed a much more public role in community mobilisation activities, even though most have not experienced homeland trauma first-hand.

5.6.2 A New Generation of Tamil Activists

Decades of political marginalisation in the North East have led many young Tamils to harbour feelings of mistrust and resentment against the Sri Lankan government. Narratives of struggle are attached to the conditions of migration; for populations after 1983 this often includes memories of conflict, trauma and resettlement. Second and third generation Tamils raised in North America and Europe have been particularly active in raising awareness about the struggle for national liberation on a global scale. A member of the editorial team at London-based news site the Tamil Guardian argued that national is the only way to ensure the security of the Tamil people moving forward, commenting, “we [Tamil Guardian] are unashamedly activist in our approach and with our view of what’s going on.”⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁶ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁸⁷ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁸⁸ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁵⁸⁹ Author interview with Tamil Guardian member on 23 August 2012, London UK.

The editor explained that like her, many Tamils raised in the UK were unapologetically critical of the Sri Lankan government. Vehemently denying any sort of association with Sri Lanka, she clarified, “I’m not from Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka means nothing to me, it’s not a state for Tamils. I am a Tamil from the North East or I could be seen as a British Tamil.”⁵⁹⁰ Putting the web to one side for a moment, the informant’s comments very clearly dislodge notions of Tamil identity from the Sri Lankan nation-state ‘container’. Fuelling an increasingly politicised collective identity, such actors base their advocacy on the indecent treatment of Tamils in Sri Lanka; a sharp contrast to the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Tamils across countries of settlement (in this case the UK).

Sentiments of moral responsibility are ingrained into diasporic consciousness through the persistent sufferings of innocent Tamil civilians. Actors contend that with greater access to resources (monetary, technical, educational) the populations outside Sri Lanka have a fundamental responsibility to fight against internal state-led oppression. Linking the collective Tamil identity to narratives of struggle, the interviewee from the Tamil Guardian explained:

“I am Eelam Tamil, the idea of not doing anything is alien. The first time I ever did anything I was around 7 or 8. It was mass rally walking through Trafalgar Square, and someone handed me the giant speaker. Since then, I’ve been active.”⁵⁹¹

Similarly, the webmaster of prominent community site Tamil Canadian commented, “I am doing my part through the web...when my relatives are being persecuted, I feel it’s my responsibility to get justice for those people.”⁵⁹² Web-based advocacy has played an important role in connecting the Tamil networks to local events in Sri Lanka. This was most notable in the Spring of 2009, with the defeat of the LTTE by Sri Lankan authorities signalling the end of the 27-year Sri Lankan civil war. Calls for mobilisation were organised and coordinated online, with new Tamil websites providing updates on the conflict in real-time. The supportive function of the web also enabled audiences to stay informed by raising

⁵⁹⁰ Author interview with Tamil Guardian member on 23 August 2012, London UK.

⁵⁹¹ Author interview with Tamil Guardian member on 23 August 2012, London UK.

⁵⁹² Author interview with Tamil Canadian member on 22 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

greater awareness on the violent state of affairs in the North East throughout their own personal channels.

Demanding justice for innocent Tamil civilians, simultaneous protest events were coordinated through social media platforms across various cities around the world including Paris, Oslo, Zurich, Port Louis, Sydney, Wellington, New York, Washington DC, Geneva, and The Hague. One of the more publicised series of demonstrations occurred in London, where protestors organised mass sit-ins, hunger strikes and roadblocks to draw widespread attention of the vicious Sri Lankan military offensive which was taking place in the North East and being neglected by global media.

Figure 5.28 Tamil Protest - London 2009



On April 11, 2009, one hundred thousand protestors jointly took to the streets of central London,⁵⁹³ demanding British governing authorities negotiate a ceasefire in Sri Lanka.⁵⁹⁴ Spearheaded by the British Tamil Forum, the protests lasted a total of 73 days and cost the Metropolitan Police £10 million in additional security services.⁵⁹⁵ The BBC reported that the

⁵⁹³ “Westminster Bridge closed after Tamil ceasefire protest,” *Theguardian.com*, last modified April 7, 2009, last accessed May 7, 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/apr/07/tamil-protest-westminster-bridge>>

⁵⁹⁴ “Tamil protest ends after 73 days,” *BBC.co.uk*, last modified June 17, 2009, last accessed May 7, 2014. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/8105879.stm>>

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

number of protestors on the ground fluctuated daily, varying from a handful of activists to “more than 15,000 as organisers called in support via text message and website posts.”⁵⁹⁶

Similar protest events were coordinated throughout the Greater Toronto Area, a city that hosts the largest migrant Tamil population in the world. Thousands of Tamils marched through the city’s downtown centre during the Spring of 2009, demanding that the Canadian government and the international community acknowledge the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan government during the closing stages of the civil war. Though generally peaceful, the large-scale disturbances in Toronto’s financial district gained protestors significant attention from mainstream media.⁵⁹⁷ On May 10, 2009, demonstrations expanded to the Gardiner Expressway, a major highway in downtown Toronto. Chanting “no more genocide”, protestors formed human chains and staged a mass sit-in, blocking both lanes of the highway.⁵⁹⁸ Although a diasporic issue or problem, this sort of protest activity takes on a human rights dimension that deserves attention in its own right.

Figure 5.29 Tamil Protests – Toronto 2009



⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ “Tamil protest moves off Gardiner to Queen's Park,” *Thestar.com*, last modified May 10, 2009, last accessed May 7, 2014.

<http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2009/05/10/tamil_protest_moves_off_gardiner_to_queens_park.html>

⁵⁹⁸ “Toronto Protestors End Blockade on Major Toronto Highway,” *CBC.ca*, last modified May 11, 2009, last accessed May 7, 2014 <<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/toronto/story/2009/05/10/toronto-tamilprotest.html>>

Digital network technology played an instrumental role in supporting these mobilisation processes. A member of the TYOUK explained, “2009 had a huge impact. You had 200,000 people protesting globally, it united everyone for the first time.”⁵⁹⁹ He attributed much of the success of the protests to the ease at which ordinary people could access web-based advocacy networks and stay up to date on events on the ground. Emphasising the reach of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter he commented, “it did a lot; everyone became an activist.”⁶⁰⁰ The interviewee from blackjuly83.com, a commemorative site, similarly noted the importance of virtual technology in steering collective action to the streets during this time:

“I don’t think the [2009] protests would have worked so well if we didn’t have images posted online...to have this, “I’m here and there”.... the youth were part of this, the elders were not leading it per say.”⁶⁰¹

Pointing to shifting changes in diaspora politics that cannot always be captured by outdated essentialist approaches, second generation youth activists were the driving force behind the 2009 protests, and brought fresh perspectives and strategies to the Tamil struggle for national liberation. Reiterating demands for self-determination, youth activists called on the international community to protect innocent Tamil civilians against state-led human rights abuses taking place in the North East. One of the most controversial features of the 2009 protests was the widespread display of Tamil Eelam flags, a symbol of national collective identity. “Protests with Eelam flags broke taboos” and caused much debate in the community due to the flag’s negative connotation with the LTTE.⁶⁰² The interviewee from the TYOUK explained the flag as a source of contention between generations, “the older people in the community were telling us to put it down, but we don’t care, we say it’s our identity.”⁶⁰³ Websites like Tamil Nation Flag (tamilnationflag.com) enable audiences to publicly endorse the ‘Tamil Eelam’ flag as a national symbol of the Tamil collective identity—a performance

⁵⁹⁹ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁶⁰⁰ Author interview with TYO member on 20 September 2012, London UK. The Tamil Youth Organisation (TYO) in the United Kingdom set up a Facebook page and Twitter account in 2009.

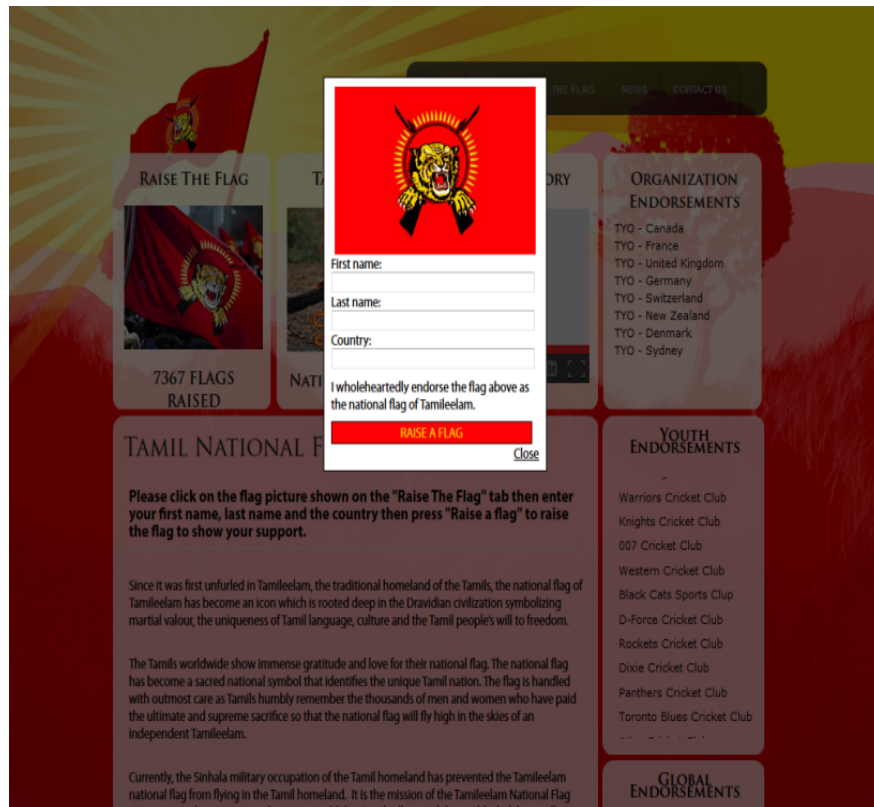
⁶⁰¹ Author interview with (CTC affiliated) Black July 1983 member on 19 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁶⁰² Author interview with Tamil Guardian member on 23 August 2012, London UK.

⁶⁰³ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

practice of expressive diaspora politics that very clearly links online and offline communities. The virtual campaign invites audiences to “raise the flag” and show their support for the national liberation movement.

Figure 5.30 <http://tamilnationalflag.com/>



Since the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, the Tamil Eelam flag⁶⁰⁴ has taken on greater significance as a symbol of solidarity and support for the Tamil cause. Virtual campaigns like Tamil National Flag serve as a symbolic reference point for transnational Tamil politics, highlighting the increased functionality of the web as a platform for identity representation and community formation.

The closing stages of the Sri Lankan civil war have come to signify a major turning point in contemporary Tamil advocacy. As pointed out by the interviewee from the Tamil

⁶⁰⁴ “Tamil National Flag,” last accessed July 7, 2014.
 <<http://tamilnationalflag.com/>>

Guardian, “the 2009 protests woke up the diaspora.”⁶⁰⁵ Most notably, the military defeat of the LTTE in the North East introduced a new generation of Tamils to the struggle for self-determination. Second generation activists have emerged as key players post 2009, shaping transnational Tamil politics through non-violent strategies (demonstrations, protests, boycotts) and democratic principles (justice, freedom, equality). The web serves as an important mobilising structure for global politics, and has become a flexible network for the transnational Tamil community to express their commitment to the Tamil ‘nation’ irrespective of geographic location. While rooted in the homeland struggle, the leadership vacuum left by the LTTE has indeed led to a conceptual widening of Tamil Eelam. By linking in to the transnational Tamil community, tech savvy diaspora advocacy networks are slowly disentangling the Tamil nation from the LTTE’s legacy of violence.

5.6.3 Post 2009: Localised Tamil Advocacy after the LTTE

In terms of both leadership and strategies of mobilisation, the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 represented a major paradigm shift in the Tamil struggle for self-determination. It is important to note that even prior to its demise, the Tamils maintained a complex relationship with the LTTE. While committed to the liberation of Tamil Eelam, many individuals expressed discontent behind closed doors with the criminal and terrorist tactics used in the armed struggle. A member of the Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC) explained that as defenders of the North East “when the Tigers came into the picture, they were treated like saviours.”⁶⁰⁶ He noted that many individuals in solidarity with the homeland struggle maintained a sense of loyalty to the LTTE, “though they were critical of them, they didn’t talk bad about them” and accepted the leadership of the militant organisation.⁶⁰⁷

The legacy of the LTTE is still felt today, with many Tamil activists making concerted efforts to more publicly disassociate calls for self-determination from militant aspects of the armed struggle. Distinguishing himself as a career activist, a member of TESOC (Tamil Eelam Society of Canada) Multicultural Settlement Services revealed that as a former lawyer, he had always been reluctant to accept the authority of the LTTE, commenting, “I was not interested in being dictated to by any militant organisation, my

⁶⁰⁵ Author interview with Tamil Guardian member on 23 August 2012, London UK.

⁶⁰⁶ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁶⁰⁷ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

commitment was to the community.”⁶⁰⁸ Many actor respondents acknowledged that over time the violent tactics of the LTTE had a negative impact on the legitimacy of Tamil grievances as well as the overall image of the Tamil community locally. In explaining key organisational challenges, a member of the TYOUK confided, “you’re always linked to the LTTE, even by some Tamils”, and added that “over the past three years, [after the LTTE’s defeat] our image has changed.”⁶⁰⁹ Similarly, the interviewee from CTC recalled that after being appointed as Director of Public Relations, the majority of his duties focused on local community outreach, “when I took over, there was so much negative media, there was no connection between the mainstream media and the Tamil community [in Canada].”⁶¹⁰

In an effort to improve the general public’s perception of the diaspora community, Tamil actors address the homeland struggle through host country democratic principles (justice, equality, freedom). A more liberal social fabric has led activists to steer away from the violent tactics that undermine the legitimacy of homeland grievances. Noting the shift to non-violent mobilisation strategies, the interviewee from TYOUK explained “we want Tamil Eelam, but the mechanisms have changed, there is no LTTE anymore.”⁶¹¹ He also pointed out that since 2009, online platforms have become a primary mechanism for activists organising calls for collective action on the ground. Second generation Tamils are particularly active online, and use web-based networks to coordinate political protests and boycott campaigns that are simultaneously both local and international. According to the editor of Tamil Guardian, the web offers a flexible network to redirect attention to the grave human rights violations committed by the Sri Lankan government authorities:

“online, we are rerouting the narrative, the struggle is there for us now. Our political views are similar, the Tamil community is absolutely behind the fact that a genocide occurred and that we need autonomy rooted in something concrete.”⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁸ Author interview with TESOC Multicultural Settlement Services member on 06 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁶⁰⁹ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁶¹⁰ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁶¹¹ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁶¹² Author interview with Tamil Guardian member on 23 August 2012, London UK.

With the support of major non-partisan organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, Tamil diaspora activists demand that domestic governments and international bodies hold Sri Lanka accountable for war crimes committed in the last stages of the civil war. Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid boycott campaigns and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, the ‘Boycott Sri Lanka’ movement has emerged as a notable example of transnational political mobilisation in the name of disenfranchised Tamils in the North East. The boycott is supported by a variety of Tamil organisations (including the British Tamil Forum, TYOUK, CTC) which aims to isolate and delegitimise Sri Lanka from world affairs through non-violent political pressure.

One of the most celebrated victories of the boycott movement occurred in November 2013, when the Prime Ministers of Canada, India and Mauritius decided not to attend the 23rd Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) set to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In the months leading up to the summit, Tamil activists and human rights organisations including Amnesty International coordinated a series of global protests, petitions and online awareness campaigns, demanding that Commonwealth leaders boycott the CHOGM.⁶¹³ In a widely circulated opinion piece “Why Commonwealth nations should boycott the Sri Lanka meeting”, the President of the CTC argued that attending the summit would only serve to legitimise the persistent pattern of human rights abuses occurring in Sri Lanka.⁶¹⁴ He reasoned that the atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan government fundamentally contradicted the core values and principles of the Commonwealth.⁶¹⁵ The ‘Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace & Justice’ (a self-defined multi-ethnic non-partisan group) provided online audiences with timely updates on the boycott from a variety of hyperlinked sources.⁶¹⁶ In an effort to expand the boycott’s reach, audiences were also invited to express

⁶¹³ “No Commonwealth seal of approach for human rights abused in Sri Lanka,” *Amnesty International UK*, last accessed July 10, 2014.

<http://webmail.amnesty.org.uk/interface/external_view_email.php?J82100854781611484734746273215>

⁶¹⁴ “Why Commonwealth nations should boycott the Sri Lanka meeting,” *Canadian Tamil Congress*, last modified November 6, 2013, last accessed July 10, 2014.

<<http://canadiantamilcongress.net/article.php?lan=eng&id=110>>

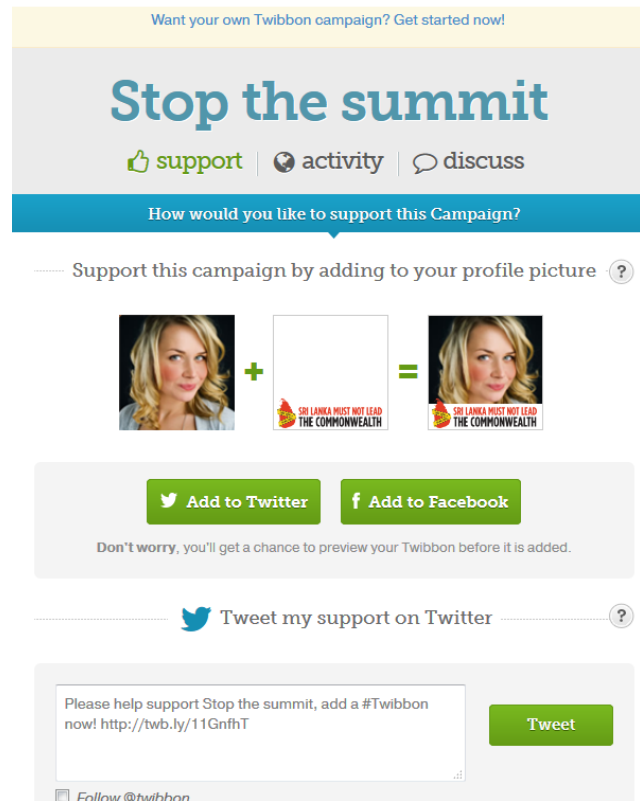
⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ “Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace & Justice,” last accessed July 10, 2014.

<<http://www.srilankacampaign.org/whatwedo.htm>>

their solidarity through collective action by sharing campaign posters and virtual ribbons on their personal social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube).⁶¹⁷

Figure 5.31 Virtual Ribbon Boycott CHOGM
(created by Twibbon, a free web-based campaign tool)⁶¹⁸



⁶¹⁷ “No Commonwealth Seal of Approval for Sri Lanka: BBC Video Report and Amnesty Petition,” *Sri Lanka Campaign* (Blog), last modified October 24, 2013, last accessed July 10, 2014.

<<http://blog.srilankacampaign.org/2013/10/no-commonwealth-seal-of-approval-for.html>>

⁶¹⁸ “Stop the summit,” *Twibbon*, last accessed July 10, 2014.

<<http://twibbon.com/Support/stop-the-summit>>

Figure 5.32 Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice
(audiences encouraged to share this poster online)⁶¹⁹



The innovative use of new technologies in coordinating the ‘Boycott CHOGM in Sri Lanka’ campaign only served to strengthen demands for government accountability from various populations around the world. In a public statement issued October 7 2013, then Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper explained that his decision to boycott the summit stemmed from the deteriorating human rights conditions in Sri Lanka. Criticising the Sri Lankan government for their lack of progress in the investigation of war crimes he stated, “the absence of accountability for the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian standards during and after the civil war is unacceptable.”⁶²⁰ Harper defended his decision to boycott the summit through democratic principles, which he argued the Commonwealth had an obligation to uphold:

⁶¹⁹ “No Commonwealth Seal of Approval for Sri Lanka: BBC Video Report and Amnesty Petition - 24 October 2013,” last accessed 10 July 2014. <<http://blog.srilankacampaign.org/2013/10/no-commonwealth-seal-of-approval-for.html>>

⁶²⁰ “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada,” *Government of Canada*, last modified October 7, 2013, last accessed July 11, 2014. <<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2013/10/07/statement-prime-minister-canada>>

“if the Commonwealth is to remain relevant it must stand in defence of the basic principles of freedom, democracy, and respect for human dignity, which are the very foundation upon which the Commonwealth was built.”⁶²¹

Underlining Canada’s international commitment to democracy he concluded, “it is clear that the Sri Lankan government has failed to uphold the Commonwealth’s core values, which are cherished by Canadians.”⁶²² While heavily criticised for attending the summit, British Prime Minister David Cameron used the political opportunity to demand that the Sri Lankan government launch a formal investigation into alleged war crimes by March 2014.⁶²³ In a statement to Parliament, he clarified “the legacy of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka is in contradiction to the good traditions of the Commonwealth”, and said that he would support a UN led investigation if the government failed to carry out its own.⁶²⁴

With Sri Lanka’s controversial human rights record overshadowing much of the summit proceedings, the ‘Boycott CHOGM in Sri Lanka’ campaign was hailed as a victory by many Tamil activists due to the negative international media attention it drew. On March 27, 2014 the UN Human Rights Council mandated the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights launch an international investigation into the alleged war crimes that occurred during the end stages of the Sri Lankan civil war.⁶²⁵ This landmark decision was widely supported by Tamil advocacy groups who in recent times have expanded the boycott movement to include cricket-sporting events. Spearheaded by the TYOUK, the ‘Boycott Sri Lanka Cricket’ campaign⁶²⁶ fuses politics to sport, and calls on the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to cut off relations with the Sri Lankan cricket team as they had done

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ “David Cameron promises Sri Lanka ‘touch message’ on alleged war crimes,” *BBC.co.uk*, last modified November 14, 2013, last accessed July 11, 2014. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24934768>>

⁶²⁴ “Sri Lanka: I was right to go to summit says Cameron,” *BBC.co.uk*, last modified November 18, 2013, last accessed July 11, 2014. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24984942>>

⁶²⁵ “UN rights council approves inquiry into alleged abuses in Sri Lankan war,” *UN News Center*, last modified March 27, 2014, last accessed July 15, 2014.

<<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47447#.U7akC7F0KIQ>>

⁶²⁶ “Boycott Sri Lanka Cricket,” *TYOUK*, last accessed July 15, 2014. <http://www.tyouk.org/?page_id=1530&event_id=12>

with a defiant Zimbabwe in 2008.⁶²⁷ Protests are largely coordinated online, through the TYOUK website and personalised social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter) and mobilise at cricket grounds on match days.

Figure 5.33 Boycott Sri Lanka Cricket Campaign



5.6.4 Political Formations Online: Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam

Contemporary Tamil activists increasingly use online platforms to mobilise and strengthen support for Tamil Eelam after 2009. As noted by the webmaster of community website Tamil Canadian, “before 2009 most of the diaspora had this mentality that there was a fighting force back home, and most of them worked around that.”⁶²⁸ With prospects of national autonomy thwarted by the leaderless political vacuum left by the LTTE, the future of Tamil Eelam currently remains unclear. The conceptual boundaries of the Tamil nation have indeed

⁶²⁷ “TYO extends ‘Boycott Sri Lanka’ to cricket,” *Tamil Guardian*, last modified March 30, 2011, last accessed July 15, 2014. <<http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=3087>>

⁶²⁸ Author interview with Tamil Canadian member on 22 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

widened in the post-war era, a reflection of the important role diaspora advocacy groups played in (re)organising and coordinating identity-based political mobilisations.

Since this time, understandings of Tamil Eelam have widened to include perspectives from the transnational Tamil community, as evidenced by the diaspora-led Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) initiative. In the aftermath of the civil war, actors recognised that Tamils in Sri Lanka lacked both the political opportunity and the structure necessary to establish a free and fair nation-state in the North East.⁶²⁹ By emphasising the political aspirations of the transnational Tamil community, the TGTE and seeks to (re)address demands for Tamil Eelam through diaspora-led, globally spread (external) political engagements.

With the cyber domain approached as a transnational political arena, the TGTE's proclaims itself as a "new political formation based on the principles of nationhood, homeland and self-determination."⁶³⁰ The transnational body is guided by democratic ideals and the rule of the law and has developed a robust organisational structure, mimicking western governments.⁶³¹ As opposed to a government in exile, the TGTE presents itself as a representative body for the transnational Tamil community spread across various countries of settlement. Countering nation state containers, these findings show that Tamil collective identity is a transnational concept that overlaps across independent sovereign territories. Self-defined members of the diaspora for example can apply for a Tamil Eelam National Card online, a symbol of citizenship and belonging to the transnational Tamil nation.⁶³² The decentralised and ubiquitous properties of online platforms enable more fluid identity-based understandings of Tamil Eelam and are pushing elements of nationalism *away* from physical territory.

⁶²⁹ "Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam – About," last accessed July 24, 2014.

<<http://tgte.org/about-tgte/#>> The TGTE was not 'live' during the mapping portion of the research project, and for this reason did not show up in the initial crawls. During this time, meetings between organisation members/candidates were coordinated on the ground.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Executive Structure of the TGTE includes a Prime Minister and an appointed Cabinet of Ministers a Transnational Constitutional Assembly, a Ministerial Cabinet, a constitution and a charter. through international elections

⁶³² Tamil Eelam National Card," *Ministry of Homeland Development Affairs, TGTE*, last accessed July 16, 2014. <<http://www.tgte-homeland.org/ten-card/>> Category of Eligibility - born in the homeland, child of someone born in homeland, intermediate family member is born in homeland, a supporter of Tamil Eelam. Application Cost: Europe - €15, UK - £15, India and Sri Lanka - \$5.00 (US), all other countries \$25(US).

Figure 5.34 Tamil Eelam National Card



The TGTE held its inaugural sessions on May 17-20, 2010 at the National Constitution Centre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Elected members from Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Switzerland, UK, and the US gathered at the historic site to discuss the defeat of the armed struggle, the future of Tamil Eelam and the human rights abuses committed by the Sri Lankan military against innocent Tamil civilians. Delegates from France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK who were unable to attend in person joined the sessions via video conference (located in London and Geneva). Digital technology played an important role in facilitating collaboration between delegates and has since become the primary mechanism through which the TGTE governs diaspora political affairs.

Parliamentary sessions⁶³³ are webcasted to promote accountability and transparency between delegates and the transnational audiences. International elections are managed by an independent Election Commission and are administered in 12 representative countries.⁶³⁴ The Election Commission's website provides information on candidates, voter eligibility, polling stations and also allows individuals to submit nominations for their constituency. Encouraging transnational political bonds through web-based engagements, the TGTE relies on the active participation of the Tamil community to validate its legitimacy. A key example

⁶³³ In accordance with the TGTE Constitution, Prime Minister V. Rudrakumaran dissolved Parliament on October 1, 2013. Newly elected Members of Parliament (112 MPs) inaugurated the second parliamentary term on 6-8 December in New Jersey, USA during which Rudrakumaran (once the legal advisor for the LTTE) was elected Prime Minister for a second term. ““United Sri Lanka,” cannot be accepted as a pre-negotiation parameter – Rudrakumaran,” *Tamil Net*, last modified July 10, 2006, last accessed July 16, 2014.

<<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=18752>> “Tamil exiles to form ‘government’,” *BBC.co.uk*, last modified September 15, 2009, last accessed July 16, 2014. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8257144.stm>>

⁶³⁴ Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, UK, US, Belgium, Luxemburg, Holland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Ireland (see: <http://tgte-ec.com>)

here is the extensive consultation processes undertaken during the initial drafting stages of the Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter. In the months prior to its formal declaration, the TGTE organised a series of international conferences and local town hall meetings to explain the purpose and significance of the Freedom Charter. An information booklet containing a survey questionnaire was disseminated to community members and diaspora organisations to gather public input on the envisioned future of Tamil Eelam and the Tamil people. The survey was also made available online (through www.tamileelamfreedomcharter.org), allowing Tamils around the world to equally express their ‘Freedom Demands’.⁶³⁵ Citing the Freedom Charter of the African National Conference (ANC) and the Palestinian National Charter as key sources of inspiration, the Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter was formally declared on May 18 2013, a date that also marks the fourth anniversary of the civil war’s brutal end.⁶³⁶

Figure 5.35 Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter – Survey Questionnaire

| | |
|--|--|
| 1) Why is a Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter necessary in your view? | |
| <input type="radio"/> a. To protect the natural rights of liberty and property and to maintain harmony | <input type="radio"/> b. They guarantee a number of personal freedoms, limit the government's |
| <input type="radio"/> c. power in judicial and other proceedings | <input type="radio"/> d. To explain to the Tamil speaking world and to the International Community the visions of aspirations of the Tamil Nation. |
| <input type="radio"/> e. All of the above | |
| 2) Who do you believe should be involved in the articulation and promulgation of this Charter? | |
| <input type="radio"/> a. Tamils everywhere | <input type="radio"/> b. Tamils in Sri Lanka |
| <input type="radio"/> c. Tamil Diaspora | <input type="radio"/> d. Tamils in Sri Lanka and Tamil Diaspora |
| 3) Do you believe the outcome of a referendum would decide the permanent political solution to liberate the Tamil people, and for them to live in peace with dignity and security as a Nation? | |
| <input type="radio"/> a. Yes | <input type="radio"/> b. No |
| <input type="radio"/> c. Not Sure | |
| 4) Do you recognise that the International Community has a role to play in resolving the Tamil national conflict in the island of Sri Lanka? | |
| <input type="radio"/> a. Yes | <input type="radio"/> b. No |
| <input type="radio"/> c. Not Sure | |
| 8) What rights constitute the Tamils' claims as a people entitled for freedom? | |
| <input type="radio"/> a. Right to a homeland | <input type="radio"/> b. Right to self-determination |
| <input type="radio"/> c. Right to nationhood | <input type="radio"/> d. Right to restore their lost sovereignty |
| 10) As a Tamil, do you want to exercise the right to self-determination and sovereignty to create an independent and Sovereign State of Tamil Eelam? | |
| <input type="radio"/> a. Yes | <input type="radio"/> b. No |
| <input type="radio"/> c. Not Sure | |

Sample (40 questions in total)⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ “Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter,” last accessed July 15, 2014.

<http://tamileelamfreedomcharter.org/?page_id=61>

⁶³⁶ “Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter to be Declared on May 18, 2013,” *Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter*, last accessed July 15, 2014. <<http://tamileelamfreedomcharter.org/?p=1>>

⁶³⁷ “Tamil Eelam Freedom Charter.”

5.7 Conclusion

The leadership vacuum left by the LTTE in 2009 denoted a major shift in the Tamil struggle for national liberation. In the current rebuilding phase, every day (resource poor) Tamil activists assume much of the responsibility for the future of Tamil Eelam. Narratives of struggle and past traumas are a source of cohesion between community members and continue to fuel sentiments of moral responsibility for Tamil ‘brothers and sisters’ in the homeland. Led by a new generation of Tamil youth activists, online platforms have come to serve two main functions.

Firstly, the web is a supportive platform of mobilisation for Tamil actors to raise awareness of grievances and organise calls to action with limited state-based hurdles (censorship). Online advocacy networks were extremely important in organising and staying updated on the globally coordinated protests of 2009. Using rights-based discourse to articulate political claims, Tamil actors continue to demand international accountability for the genocidal acts committed by Sri Lankan authorities during the end stages of the civil war. As shown in this chapter, these issue agendas have become part of the broader Tamil collective identity, and are slowly gaining recognition from the broader international community through the master frame of human rights.

Secondly, the web has enabled more fluid and decentralised understandings of the Tamil nation, beyond territorial nation-state containers that have dominated the study of diaspora politics for decades. Actors use online platforms to disseminate narratives of struggle and ethno-nationalist grammar in an effort to strengthen community representations amidst the post 2009 leaderless nexus. Through memorialised past traumas, online platforms become a collective site for commemoration and virtually unite the transnational community. These emergent realities transcend the triadic model and have led to a widening of perspectives throughout the community. While committed to Tamil Eelam, the political struggle for self-determination lacks clear leadership. Future prospects for independent statehood in the North East for this reason remain especially bleak. Acknowledging this reality, actors involved in Tamil diaspora politics direct their efforts to (re)unifying and strengthening the post-conflict transnational community. The research findings presented in this case study, are further expanded upon in chapter seven through a comparative analysis of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics.

VI

6. PALESTINIAN ONLINE IDENTITY POLITICS

“...many people from the community don’t want politics, they say ‘let’s be social, let’s not get involved in political issues’, and they might be right. But at the same time, we’re Palestinians, we have an issue, we cannot throw that fact...”⁶³⁸

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents web-based articulations of Palestinian diaspora politics. For over 50 years, Palestinian collective identity has remained well rooted in narratives of conflict, displacement and the struggle for self-determination in the territorial homeland. Demanding accountability from international bodies like the UN, actors involved in Palestinian identity politics have consistently articulated territorial claims through universal principles of human rights and international law. The Palestinian cause has attracted international support for decades, making it increasingly difficult to disentangle Palestinian diaspora politics from broader transnational advocacy networks. The statistical Big Data presented in this chapter show that the conceptual boundaries of ‘Palestinian’ virtual space remain particularly unclear, especially when compared to triadic, essentialist analyses. One of the key distinguishing features of Palestinian online identity politics is the number of non-Palestinians who link in to community-specific networks in support of the Palestinian political cause. Prominent transnational solidarity groups and BDS (Boycott, divestment, sanctions) movement campaigns serve as reference points for community activists and supporters. Catering to a transnational audience, Palestinian virtual space is maintained through a loose network of community members and ‘cause-based’ activists who use online platforms to mobilise around issues in the Palestinian homeland.

⁶³⁸ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

6.1.1 Chapter Structure

To contextualise the growing internationalisation of the Palestinian cause, the chapter begins with historical overview of the political grievances that have played a key role in shaping contemporary Palestinian narratives. Collective memories of displacement and forced exile remain integral to Palestinian identity, and include the many inconsequential UN resolutions that have failed the Palestinian community over the decades. The history of messy dispersal and the issue of Palestinian refugees play a crucial role in fusing Palestinian politics to international politics.

To illustrate the complexity and loose conceptual boundaries of Palestinian virtual space, background information is followed by an analysis of corpus findings from the web cartography results of the Palestinian e-Diaspora Atlas. The virtual analysis set out in this section are unconstrained and are thus able to focus on the activity subsets that demonstrate the greatest influence online. This includes news and community based websites and peace, political rights and protest activities. News-based websites disseminate real-time updates of the on-the-ground politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Community websites differ in that they represent grassroots non-profit organisations and informal groups that often maintain a footing in the Occupied Territories. Peace, political rights and protest activities are cause-based, and do not always represent Palestinian collective identity. These activity subsets maintain loose boundaries, and characteristically use virtual space to mobilise around issues in the Palestinian homeland. The visual representations and statistical data presented in this chapter are used explore the online component neglected in traditional approaches, and can be accessed through the e-Diasporas Atlas website (map.e-diasporas.fr).

The chapter then presents web-based content analysis results more accurately and in more detail to highlight the dominant narratives and themes discussed Palestinian virtual space more clearly. The final section of chapter aims to disentangle Palestinian virtual space by drawing on actor interviews. This includes special consideration of the impact that solidarity networks and BDS movement campaigns have had in internationalising the Palestinian cause. The respondent sample comprises self-defined community actors and ‘cause-based’ activists, who in support of the Palestinian cause link in to community network space. While Palestinian-specific, these network linkages are equally as dense as they are diverse, and can sometimes be a source of contention for Palestinian community members.

The chapter concludes with a discussion on the latest 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict and the transformative impacts smartphone technology and social media platforms have had in adding another personalised layer to mobilisation processes and protest activities.

6.2 Background

6.2.1 Narratives of Forced Exile

Palestinian grievances are largely rooted in sentiments of “exile and displacement.”⁶³⁹ This is particularly linked to the *Nakba* (day of catastrophe) of 1948, and the 1967 Six-Day war known as the *Naksa* (the day of setback). Although decades in the past, these events continue bond and unite dispersed Palestinian populations. The 1948 *Nakba* marks a day of tragedy, in which some 750,000–800,000 Palestinians were forced out of their ancestral homes.⁶⁴⁰ Narratives rooted in forced exile and prospects for return have since expanded outward and upward. Many consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be a key cornerstone within the greater Arab (Middle Eastern) narrative.⁶⁴¹ Palestinian grievances continue to remain concretely linked to both the *Nakba* and the creation of the state of Israel and are therefore of great social and political relevance not only to the Middle East but also global affairs more broadly.⁶⁴² The lack of political resolution to the conflict continues to be a source of intrigue for individuals outside the community who seek to educate and open limited barriers of inclusion to engage more closely in regional affairs (and increasingly on a transnational scale).

6.2.2 Migration Patterns

Palestinian grievances transcend territorial boundaries due to the complexity of past and current migration patterns. Migration statistics are largely considered approximations, an unfortunate reality attributed to the instability of Palestinian governing institutions. Further complicating statistics, many Palestinian migrants (voluntary and forced) have for decades

⁶³⁹ Dan Rabinowitz, “The Return of the Right of Return: The Palestinian Diaspora and the Political Process in the Middle-East in Theoretical Perspective,” *JCAS Symposium Series, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology* (17) (2005): 47.

⁶⁴⁰ Dina Matar, “The Palestinians in Britain, News and the Politics of Recognition,” *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 2 (3) (2007): 321.

⁶⁴¹ Dina Matar, “Diverse Diasporas, One Meta-Narrative: Palestinians in the UK Talking about 11 September 2001,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32 (6) (2006): 1029.

⁶⁴² Rabinowitz 2005, 47.

assumed pseudo ethnic identities from neighbouring Arab countries (to expedite the process of immigration). Generally however, socio-economic migration to western societies began in the late 18th Century.⁶⁴³ From the 1950s onward, voluntary migration (including students and civil servant professionals) occurred at a far more aggressive pace. This was periodically exacerbated by forced exiles, such as the one associated with the 1967 Six-Day war, in which some 250,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes.⁶⁴⁴ Today, it is estimated that some 75% of Palestinians live outside their ancestral homes.⁶⁴⁵ As of 2013, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimates there to be some 11.8 million Palestinians worldwide, of which only 4.5 million⁶⁴⁶ live in Palestine (44.2% are considered refugees).⁶⁴⁷ Over half of the total population lives outside Palestine, with 5.2 million residing in neighbouring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria), 1.4 million in Israel and some 665,000 around the world.⁶⁴⁸ More recently, the Gulf region, Europe and the US have emerged as key destinations for Palestinian migrants.⁶⁴⁹

6.2.3 Internationalised Grievances

Regional hostility linked to the 1982 Israel–Lebanon war, the 1991 Gulf War, and the Intifada's of 1986 and 2001 has increased waves of Palestinian migration to Europe and North America.⁶⁵⁰ Beyond the violent history of dispersal, these events speak to the

⁶⁴³ Matar 2007, 321.

⁶⁴⁴ Anna di Bartolomeo, Tamirace Fakhoury and Delphine Perrin, "CARIM–Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration," *Europe* 29 (2010): 1.

⁶⁴⁵ Rabinowitz 2005, 47.

⁶⁴⁶ "State of Palestine," *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics*, last modified December 2013, last accessed February 5, 2014. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/PressEn.aspx>

⁶⁴⁷ "Palestine Refugees," *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)*, last accessed March 2, 2014. <<http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>> Palestine refugees are defined as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." UNRWA services are available to all those living in its area of operations who meet this definition, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration. When the Agency began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, some 5 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services.

⁶⁴⁸ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release on the Palestinians in the World, (December 2013), retrieved February 5, 2014, from Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/PressEn.aspx>

⁶⁴⁹ Philippe Rekacewicz, La diaspora palestinienne dans le monde, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, last Modified February 2000, last Accessed 21 March 2014. <<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cartes/refugiesdiasporapaldpl2000>>

⁶⁵⁰ Anat Ben-David, "The Palestinian diaspora on the Web: Between de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation," *Social Science Information* 51 (4) (2012): 4.

persistent instability across the region. The question of Palestine and Palestinian refugees remains cemented into contemporary Middle Eastern politics and the greater Arab narrative. With the international community watching, numerous attempts have been made by key organisations and governing institutions to rectify and resolve contentious land claims of the past. Decades of inconsequential UN Resolutions continue to pin the Palestinian diaspora politics and the refugee issue to international politics. Past examples include the 1948 General Assembly Resolution 194 (Right of Return), the 1967 Security Council Resolution 242 (ending the illegal Israeli occupation), the 1974 General Assembly Resolution 3236 (Palestinian right to self-determination), and the 1979 Security Council Resolution 446 (ending illegal Israeli settlements). These agreements, despite having been formalised by international governing bodies, have provided minimal resolve for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

As an identity-based and politically bound community, physical territories lack coherence in terms of vision, opportunities or motivations. This is largely due to the messy history of dispersal, which has contributed to a transnational network lacking a clear institutional centre on the ground. Palestinian grievances emphasise the idea of a ‘homeland’, but populations remain divided between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The most basic questions of what the Palestinian ‘homeland’ (if ever attained) would constitute differ between factions. Lacking a sole reference point on the ground, territorial claims are structured around the Right of Return and the master frame of human rights—in this case the right to self-determination.

The role of the Palestinian diaspora in centring and maintaining transnational advocacy networks remains unclear. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Palestinian activists played a significant role in provoking transnational sentiments of nationhood, camaraderie and cultural unity.⁶⁵¹ Current offline networked linkages do not mimic those of the past, which has cast some doubt on the role of the diaspora in propagating unified sentiments of Palestinian collective identity.⁶⁵² Unresolved grievances and territorial claims direct community actors and ‘cause-based’ activists to the on-the-ground politics of the

⁶⁵¹ Rabinowitz 2005, 41.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

contemporary Palestinian conflict, which makes analysis of diaspora politics far more multifaceted compared to the other two case studies.

This chapter will use network linkages to demonstrate that online platforms support an increased internationalisation of the Palestinian cause. Admittedly the echoes of Palestinian grievances have been heard across the world for decades. Grievance narratives have had time to brew, and are now maintained by self-perpetuating activist networks that have limited identity-based bonds with the Palestinian diaspora community but which are not contained by the nation-state. Online platforms have come to serve as an empowering resource for community members and cause-based activists to join forces in their support for Palestinian political rights. We note this in the increased popularity of news based websites, transnational solidarity networks and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. In a quest for greater transnational applicability, online Palestinian advocacy networks continue to evolve beyond triadic relations and nation-state container approaches that currently guide diaspora politics in IR world affairs. The Palestinian case underlines the growing utility of the web as an instrument for bottom up mobilisation processes.

6.3 Virtual Platforms: Web Cartography - Palestinian e-Diaspora Atlas

Informed by the methodological framework of the e-Diasporas atlas project,⁶⁵³ this chapter uses results from the Palestinian corpus to explore Palestinian online identity politics. Beyond the maintenance of political grievances, web-based representations of Palestinian diaspora politics are not focused on the transnational community *per se*. The cyber domain is used to support the dissemination of newsworthy affairs most concretely linked to questions of statehood and the daily struggles of life under occupation. Online representations of the greater Palestinian community are characteristically rooted in political cause-based territorial claims, rather than ethno-religious attachments. The evidence will show that Palestinian virtual space maintains flexible boundaries of inclusion, with calls for mobilisation often contextualised through grievance-specific rights-based language (justice, occupation, freedom). This is complemented by expressive forms of politics including grievance specific

⁶⁵³ See the methodology section of this study for a more detailed account of the methodological and technical tools employed. All the data presented in this virtual analysis can be accessed through the interactive maps: < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section§ion=27> >

audio and visual splash imagery, most commonly displaying historical maps, Palestinian flags and symbols (including the Keffiyeh), and ciaos on the ground.

In the digital age, online platforms provide a communicative opportunity to educate self-defined community members and non-Palestinians about the ongoing Palestinian struggle for international recognition. Lacking a physically united centre of gravity, dispersed Palestinian pockets form flexible bonds through collective memories of homeland conflict, communal suffering, displacement and political injustice. Online activities build from well-established claims of political marginalisation by reinforcing the inhumane realities of life under occupation. By capturing and tracing corpus node linkages I connect rights-based online engagements to the ground through calls for active protest, transnational solidarity and boycott movements. Statistical results are regarded as a point of inference to more precisely assess the scope and depth of Palestinian virtual space, and this includes investigating the authenticity of online representations with respect to community ownership. To disentangle community from cause, emphasis is placed on deciphering between those linkages that cluster around value-driven political convictions and those which are rooted in ethno-religious or communal-based attachments. With a focus on news, community, peace and political rights-based activities, the following analysis challenges triadic essentialist approaches to diaspora politics by presenting key findings from the e-Diasporas atlas Palestinian corpus.

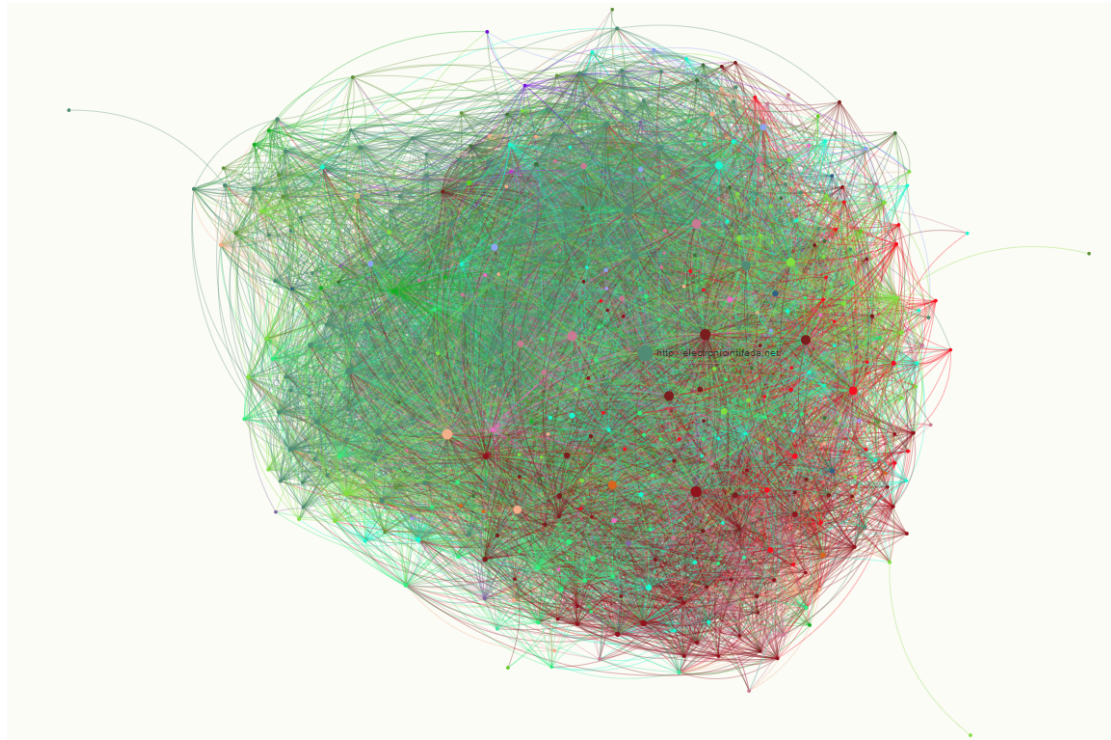
6.3.1 Palestinian Corpus - Online Activity

The Palestinian corpus consists of 493 nodes (websites), and as explained in the methodological chapter of the thesis was compiled through a series of automatic crawls as part of the e-Diasporas atlas project.⁶⁵⁴ A more detailed account of the coding and classification scheme employed to obtain the visual cartographic representation of mapping results is also provided in this chapter. The following analysis focuses primarily on the

⁶⁵⁴ See methodology section of this study for a more detail account of the methodological and technical tools employed. All of the data presented in this virtual analysis can be accessed through the interactive maps: < <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section§ion=35>>

activity classification subset of the Palestinian corpus.⁶⁵⁵ Node (website) linkages are evaluated relative to their overall representation and influence within the corpus.

Figure 6.1 Palestinian Corpus - Activity Map



⁶⁵⁵ The corpus is classified based on the following: type of site, actor, activity, secondary activity, location, language.

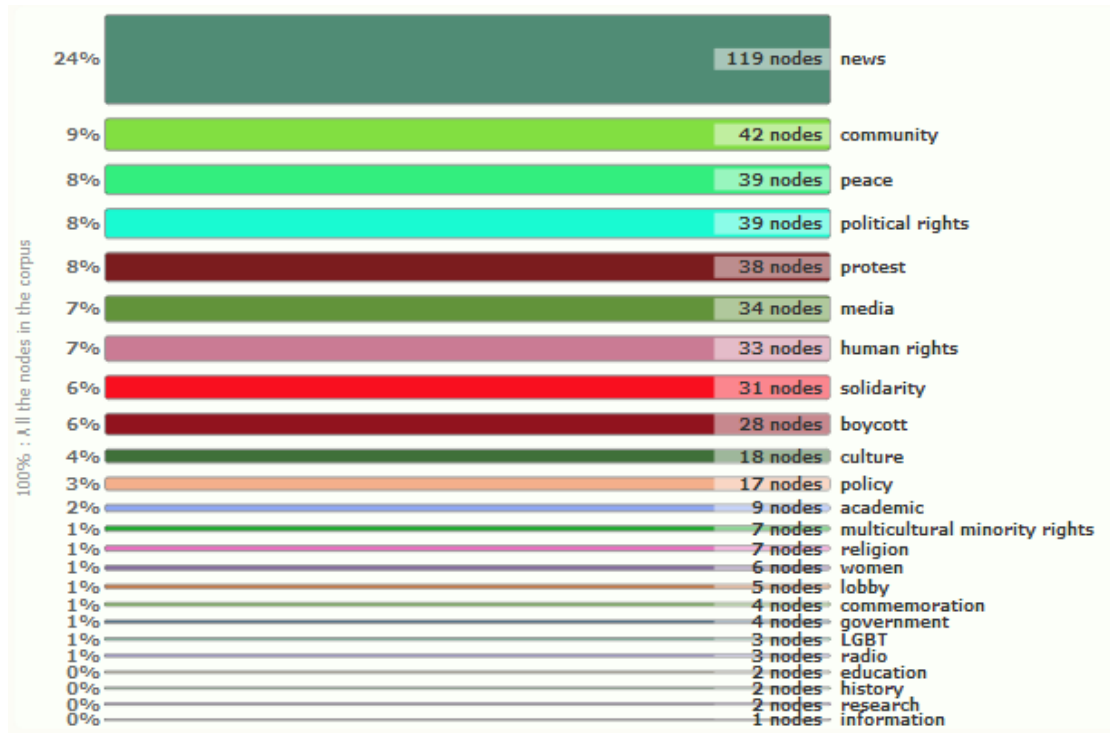


Figure 6.1 shows statistical representations of Palestinian online activity, and shows that node linkages are densely interwoven throughout the corpus structure. Just under half of all corpus nodes centre on news, community, peace and political rights-based activity (239 nodes out of 493).⁶⁵⁶ By streamlining flow linkages throughout the corpus, electronicintifada.net is visibly highlighted as a key authority. As discussed in detail below, the website serves as the overarching authority information hub for the majority of Palestinian virtual activities. As a community defined by unresolved grievances and territorial claims, news-based websites are used to update transnational audiences of the on-the-ground politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Newsworthy headlines characteristically integrate human rights as a master frame in order to focus on current conditions in the occupied territories, UN resolutions and prospects for Palestinian statehood.

News-based linkages maintain influence throughout a significant portion of the corpus. When analysing the Palestinian activity map, we note the bridging functionalities of community, peace and political rights linkages. This is most visible in the bottom right of the corpus which largely consists of activities based in protest, solidarity and boycott. Corpus statistics presented below provide a more detailed account of the proportional influence of

⁶⁵⁶ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=5§ion=35>>

these subset activities. This includes analysis of both key corpus authorities as well as the overall ‘reach’ of activity linkages (edges) between corpus nodes.

Linking Corpus Node Edges

| Edges Related to the entire Palestinian Corpus (% of influence overall within the network) | |
|---|-----|
| News | 45% |
| Community | 14% |
| Peace | 15% |
| Political Rights | 14% |
| Protest | 17% |

The above table describes the overall influence of subset activities relative to the total number of linkages between corpus nodes. News-based nodes influence just under half (45%) of all corpus links (edges); maintaining a significantly more visible online presence than activities based in community, peace, political rights and protest. The bridging capabilities of community, peace, political rights and protest based website nodes are most clear when considering the total corpus reach (60%). Numerical corpus data provides a more relational account of node linkages flowing between and within activity subsets.

Palestinian Corpus Distribution

| Corpus Activity | Corpus Nodes | Corpus Representation | Inbound Density | Internal Density | Outbound Density |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| News | 119 | 24% | 5.9 | 9.5 | 4.9 |
| Community | 42 | 9% | 5 | 4.9 | 4.8 |
| Peace | 39 | 8% | 4.1 | 7 | 6.8 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| Political Rights | 39 | 8% | 4.5 | 5.1 | 5.7 |
| Protest | 38 | 8% | 7.6 | 9.7 | 4.9 |
| Media | 34 | 7% | 2.3 | 3.5 | 6.6 |
| Human Rights | 33 | 7% | 7.5 | 7.3 | 4.5 |
| Solidarity | 31 | 6% | 3.7 | 9.1 | 5.3 |

The above table presents numerical and statistical data obtained from the Palestinian activity corpus. It shows the total number of corpus nodes for key activity subsets. Corpus representation is calculated relative to the total number of nodes (493 in total). Density is understood as the flow of linkages (edges) between and within activity subsets. Inbound density signifies the flow of external nodes ‘linking in’ to the particular subset activity, whereas outbound density signifies ‘linking out’ to nodes beyond the specific activity subset. Internal density is defined as the linkages between nodes belonging to the same activity subset.

According to the statistical results, news-based activity maintains substantial authority in the corpus (24% of all nodes). Collectively, the above activity subsets account for 77% of all corpus nodes, informing much of the thematic boundaries of greater Palestinian webspace. Corpus data shows that news, peace, protest and solidarity activities maintain a higher internal density through a clustered relationship between respective subsets. Compared to inbound and outbound flows, these node subsets carry a comparatively higher proportion of internal mutual linkages. In contrast, online activities based in political rights and media maintain an ‘in deficit’ ($\text{inbound} < \text{outbound}$) link flow against external activity nodes. This means that political rights and media-based nodes strengthen web presence by linking in to neighbouring corpus nodes. This differs from community and human rights-based activity subsets, which maintain authority through comparatively ‘in profit’ ($\text{inbound} > \text{outbound}$) linkages from external nodes.

Decades of conflict on the world stage are statistically visible online, highlighting the fact that Palestinian representations follow a more cause-based approach which cannot be

explained by traditional theoretical and methodological approaches to diaspora that constrain definitions of cause and identity. Community-based online activity makes up only 9% of corpus nodes, which suggests that discussion of political grievances are not limited to or contained by ethno-religious identity-based boundaries. Instead, online platforms support Palestinian grievances by directing audiences to websites that focus on issues in the homeland. Territorial claims remain integral to Palestinian collective identity, and therefore overshadow online identity politics. The depth and scope of online networks follow a hierarchy of instrumental utility or purpose (political mobilisation). Corpus trends suggest that sentiments of attachment are largely streamlined through political convictions as opposed to ethno-religious belonging; obscuring the presence of diaspora-specific community representations online.

Top 10 (authoritative) Palestinian diaspora Websites

| Website | | Actor | Activity | Language | Location | Inbound Links |
|---|------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| http://electronicintifada.net/ | Site | Media Organisation | News | English | USA | 415 |
| http://bdsmovement.net/ | Site | Group | Boycott | English | Palestine | 262 |
| http://palsolidarity.org/ | Site | Group | Protest | English | USA | 255 |
| http://mondoweiss.net/ | Site | Media Organisation | Policy | English | USA | 245 |
| http://palestinechronicle.com/ | News Group | Media Organisation | News | English | USA | 223 |
| http://amnesty.org/ | Site | Organisation | Human Rights | English | UK | 223 |
| http://stopthewall.org/ | Site | Organisation | Protest | English/Arabic/Spanish/German | Israel | 218 |
| http://freegaza.org/ | Site | Group | Protest | English | USA | 217 |
| http://pchrgaza.org/ | Site | Organisation | Human Rights | English/Arabic | Palestine | 211 |
| http://palestinemonitor.org/ | Site | Group | News | English | Palestine | 196 |

The table above presents the top ten Palestinian corpus authorities as determined by inbound linkages. Notable commonalities exist between cross-classifications. As opposed to referencing the ethnic aspects of the Palestinian community, as essentialist approaches would have us believe, corpus authorities clearly focus on the Palestinian political cause. Website domain names are expressive and monitor Palestinian political affairs in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Nodes characteristically represent large-scale actors (not bloggers), (media) organisations and informal group collectives. It should be noted that amnesty.org is the only non-‘Palestinian’ specific website to carry authority within the corpus. As a non-governmental organisation, Amnesty International is widely recognised as a watchdog for

issue agendas pertaining to international justice, human rights, and refugees.⁶⁵⁷ Amnesty International maintains over 3 million supporters worldwide in over 150 countries and territories.⁶⁵⁸ Corpus nodes confirm the authority of Amnesty International by linking in to the organisation as a way to mobilise claims rooted in international law and universal principles of human rights, which I argue is a master frame of mobilisation in global diaspora politics, as the issues raised are not specifically Palestinian but are in fact world affairs problems.

Corpus authorities are presented as online resource hubs for those seeking more in-depth information on the Palestinian cause. We can see this through references to the separation wall (the Israeli West Bank barrier), conditions in the Gaza Strip and the solidarity movement. Focusing on mobilisation instead of representation, these corpus authorities are registered to locations with strategic interests in the Israel-Palestine conflict (USA, Palestine, Israel). The role of the ‘diaspora’ in maintaining transnational linkages for the above reasons remains especially minimal. Corpus authorities maintain influence through content dissemination that is topically flexible yet still framed through a rights-based approach that is more likely to resonate with a broad international audience.

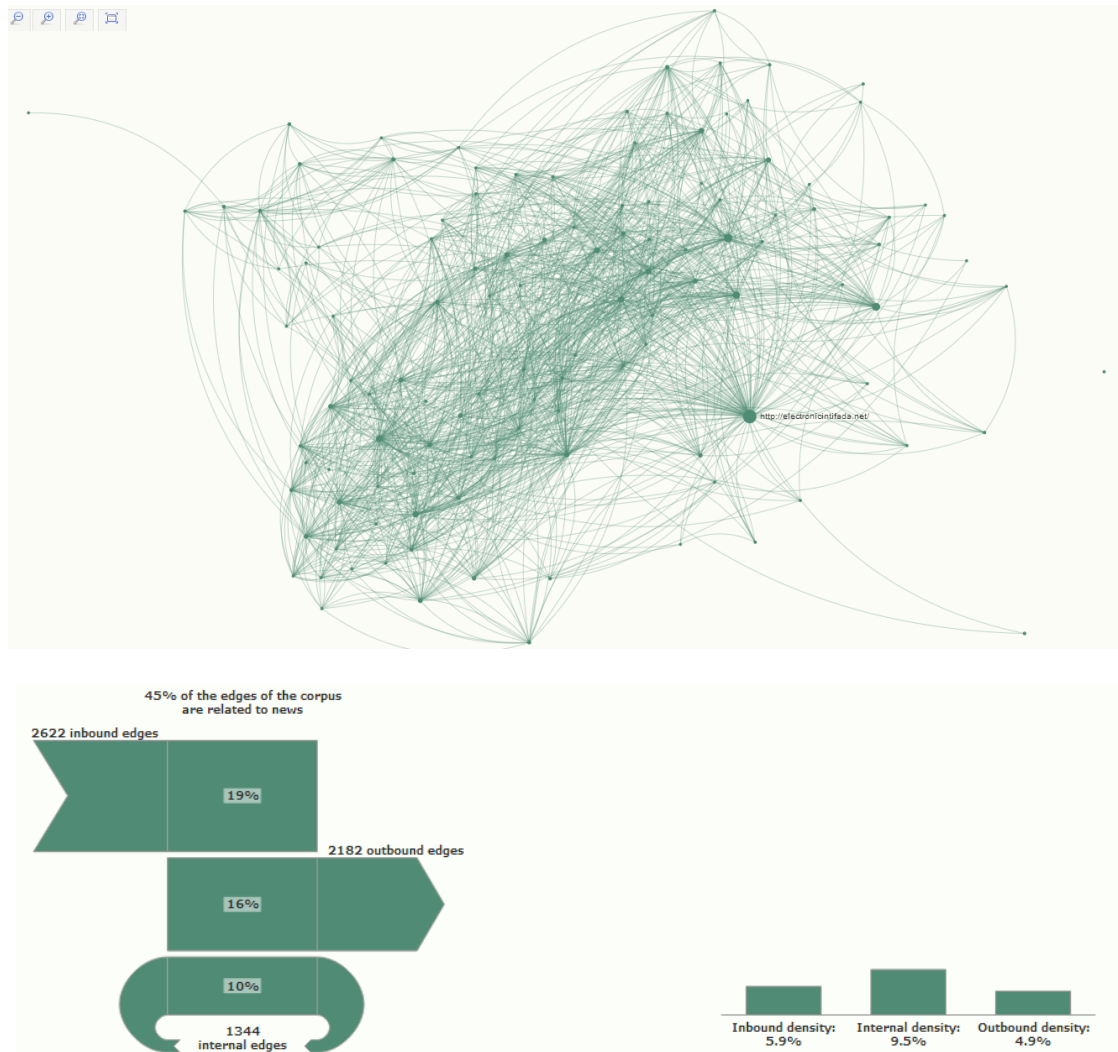
As an online resource, corpus authorities streamline and strengthen mobilisation efforts around the Palestinian cause. Countering physical gaps, cyberspace provides an open source platform for community members and ‘cause-based’ activists to connect and stay well informed on the contemporary Palestinian conflict. As discussed in detail below, corpus findings show that actors that use news based websites play a key role in disseminating the on-the-ground politics of the Palestinian homeland.

⁶⁵⁷ Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁶⁵⁸ “Who We Are,” *Amnesty International*, last accessed April 5, 2014.
<<http://amnesty.org/en/who-we-are>>

6.3.2 Palestinian Corpus - News On-the-Ground

Figure 6.2 Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - News



Comprising 119 nodes (24% of all activity), Figure 6.2 offers a virtual snapshot of news-based corpus activity.⁶⁵⁹ Compared against the Palestinian activity map, we note that the majority of news-based node linkages occupy the centre of the corpus. The isolation also highlights the disseminating capabilities of electronicintifada.net, the central resource authority of online Palestinian identity politics. As informed by corpus statistics, news-based

⁶⁵⁹ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - News. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=5§ion=35&value=news>>

nodes maintain a higher internal density (9.5%), compared to both inbound and outbound external flows. This means that moderators of news-based nodes more frequently cross-reference and ‘link in’ to one another, implying a relationship of significant interactive connectivity within the subset.

As an instrument to support mobilisation processes, newsworthy online affairs focus on issues located in the Palestinian homeland. This includes updating audiences on conditions in the occupied territories, networked protest activities and the overall quest for international recognition in the form of political rights. Mimicking physical network linkages, political grievances serve as a source of unity across Palestinian virtual space. News-based content is not diaspora specific, however, and engages instead in a rights-based discourse as a means of strengthening the role of these transnational network linkages in online global affairs.

Figure 6.3 Palestinian Corpus News Hyperlink Flow (edges)



Figure 6.3 presents the inbound and outbound linkages flowing between news-based activity nodes which guide the network boundaries of Palestinian virtual space. With a greater number of linkages flowing inward, news maintains an ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship with nodes based in community (294), political rights (282), peace (339) media (373), solidarity (194) and boycott (144). Collectively, the above activities account for 1586 links, significantly greater than outbound flow linkages (955 links). Representing 61% of all corpus nodes, the linkages make a substantial contribution to the overall network structure. Through timely updates, news-based content is a point of reference for external website moderators seeking to legitimise the relevancy of their online presence. Calls for mobilisation are reflexive, with Palestinian territorial claims serving to unite transnational audiences between the online and offline environment.

It follows that news-based nodes maintain an ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relationship with human rights and protest based activity subsets. Actors in charge of online news authorities frequently monitor claims of human rights violations and real-time networked protest activities. News-based nodes link in to human rights and protest subsets as a way of updating transnational audiences on networked activities organised in response to ongoing oppression in the occupied territories with greater ease. International law and illegal Israeli settlements most often serve as the focal points of discussion on these websites. News-based website nodes equally highlight the standardisation of rights-based discourse (apartheid, occupation, human rights, justice, boycott, resistance) within Palestinian virtual space.

Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside news
that are cited by the most nodes in news

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM news |
|---|----------------------------|
| http://electronicintifada.net/ | 96 |
| http://palestinechronicle.com/ | 60 |
| http://richardsilverstein.com/ | 51 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://972mag.com/ | 50 |
| http://imeu.net/ | 43 |
| http://palestinemonitor.org/ | 43 |
| http://ifamericansknew.org/ | 40 |
| http://www.palestine-info.co.uk/ | 38 |
| http://globalresearch.ca/ | 36 |
| http://wrmea.com/ | 34 |

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside news

that are cited by the most nodes in other activity (*primary cause*)

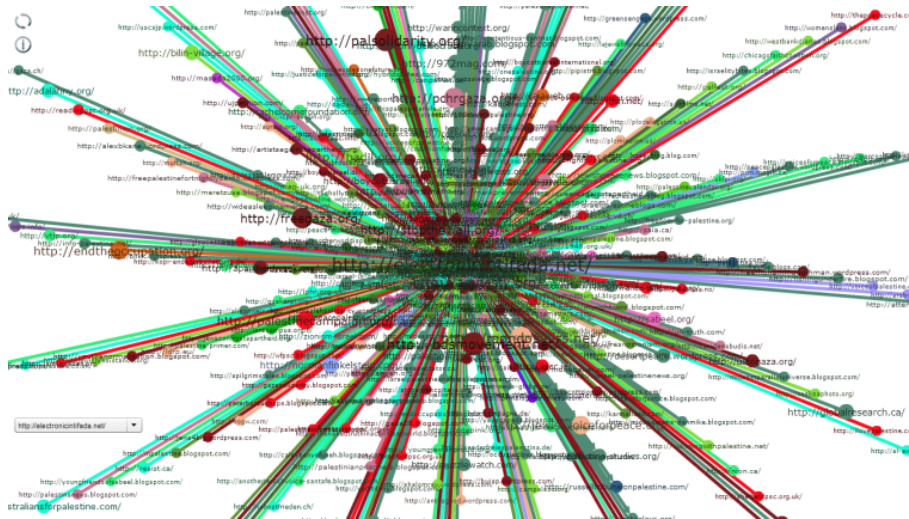
| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|--|
| http://electronicintifada.net/ | 319 |
| http://palestinechronicle.com/ | 163 |
| http://palestinemonitor.org/ | 153 |
| http://ifamericansknew.org/ | 126 |
| http://richardsilverstein.com/ | 88 |
| http://imeu.net/ | 86 |
| http://972mag.com/ | 82 |
| http://wrmea.com/ | 80 |
| http://globalresearch.ca/ | 77 |
| http://www.palestine-info.co.uk/ | 65 |

Subgraph and representative authority statistics confirm the influential web presence of the central news node electronicintifada.net. Neighbour exploration results highlight electronicintifada.net as the most frequently cited node of the entire corpus (415 referrers). The exploration of linkages provides a visual snapshot of the total ‘reach’ of the node, which while dense does indicate significant links to news, boycott, protest and peace activity nodes.

Electronicintifada.net Neighbours⁶⁶⁰

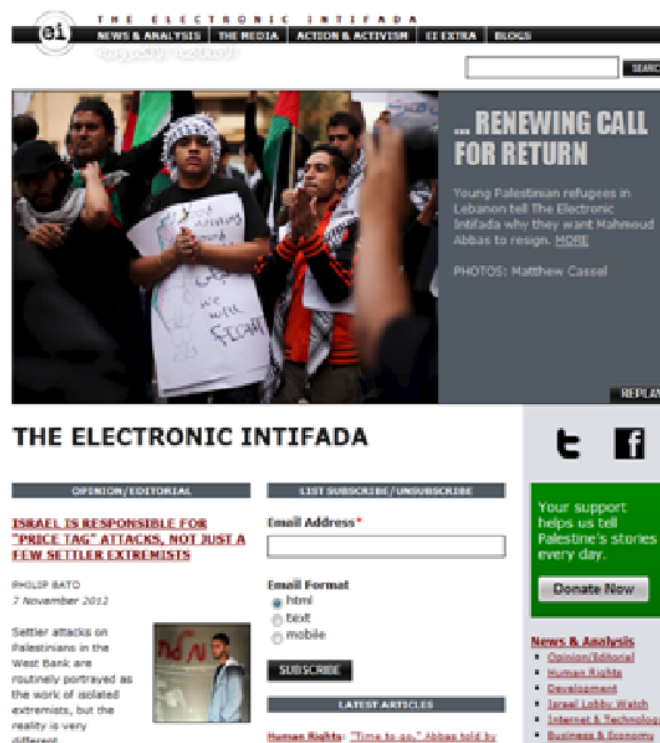
| Referrers <i>(Nodes that cite http://electronicintifada.net/)</i> | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by http://electronicintifada.net/)</i> | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://electronicintifada.net/)</i> |
|---|--|---|
| 415 → | ↑ 27 ↓ | 34 → |

Figure 6.4 Electronicintifada.net Node Linkage Exploration



⁶⁶⁰ Electronicintifada.net Corpus Node Exploration.
 <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=86&map=68&node=353§ion=35>>

Figure 6.5 <http://electronicintifada.net/>

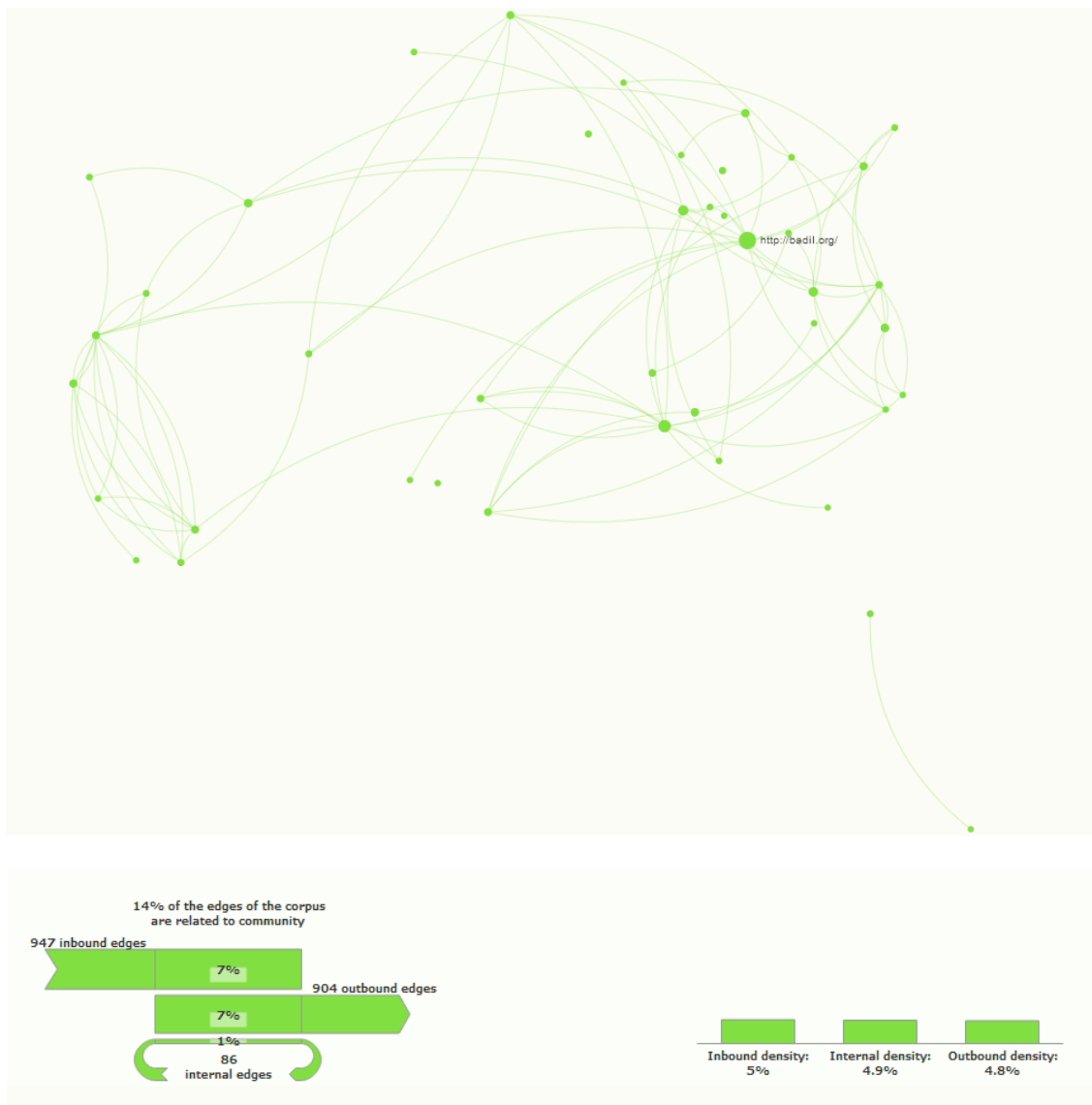


As seen in the above website interface, electronicintifada.net⁶⁶¹ follows a colour scheme similar to that of the Palestinian flag (green, red, black, white). Through text and images—new forms of expressive politics enabled by the web—the website content is specific to the Palestinian cause. Audiences are invited to join the virtual uprising (intifada) and are able to easily access news, media and blogs through subheading references and a site-specific search engine. Equally notable are the calls for support from audiences both virtually (Twitter and Facebook) and financially (donations).

⁶⁶¹ “The Electronic Intifada,” *Electronic Intifada*, last accessed November 4, 2012.
<<http://electronicintifada.net/>>

6.3.3 Palestinian Corpus - Community Narratives Online

Figure 6.6 Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Community



Accounting for only 9% (42 nodes) of all corpus activity, Figure 6.6 is isolated for community based activity nodes.⁶⁶² The structural influence of community is minimal when compared against the greater activity corpus map. Node linkages are scattered through the corpus structure, with badil.org (a local organisation based in the occupied territories)

⁶⁶² Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Community. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=5§ion=35&value=community>>

maintaining visible authority within the subset. Representations of ‘community’ build upon Palestinian grievance narratives, however are directed to differing focal points of emphasis.

With a hierarchy of purpose, the politics of the contemporary Palestinian conflict trump community representation and identity formation activities online. Most importantly, because the Palestinian community maintains an inherently politicised identity, community based online activities are largely directed to homeland issue agendas. Community-based nodes are minimally ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound), with internal (4.9%) and outbound (4.8%) linkages complementing inbound flows (5%). Subgraph and representative authority statistics presented below allow for greater insight into prominent community node linkages (edges).

Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside community
that are cited by the most nodes in community

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM community |
|---|---------------------------------|
| http://badil.org/ | 14 |
| http://bilin-village.org/ | 9 |
| http://jewishschool.com/ | 7 |
| http://palestineonlinestore.com/ | 6 |
| http://map-uk.org/ | 6 |
| http://jewlicious.com/ | 5 |
| http://pengon.org/ | 4 |
| http://zaytoun.org/ | 4 |
| http://pmrs.ps/ | 3 |
| http://jvoices.com/ | 3 |

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside community

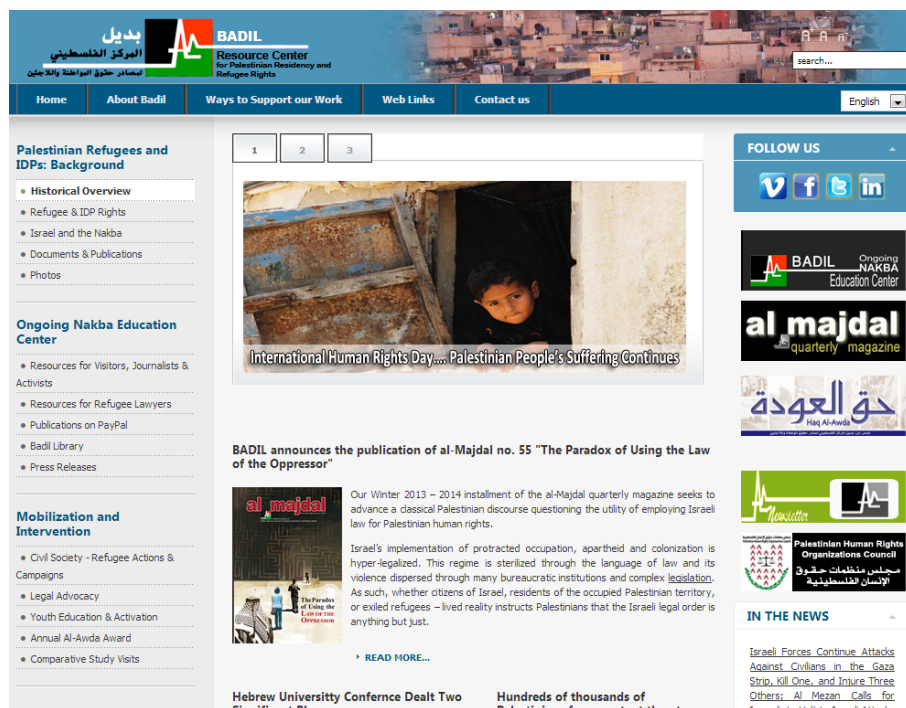
that are cited by the most nodes in other activity (*primary cause*)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://badil.org/ | 181 |
| http://bilin-village.org/ | 98 |
| http://palestineonlinestore.com/ | 64 |
| http://map-uk.org/ | 50 |
| http://ngo-monitor.org/ | 40 |
| http://pmrs.ps/ | 36 |
| http://jordanvalleysolidarity.org/ | 36 |
| http://zaytoun.org/ | 36 |
| http://pengon.org/ | 31 |
| http://apjp.org/ | 30 |

Subgraph and representative authorities are incredibly diverse in the scope of online Palestinian representations. Bilin-village.org for example roots its online presence in Bil'in, an olive producing Palestinian village struggling to maintain rights over land. Palestineonlinestore.com and zaytoun.org conversely offer a variety of Palestinian specific products and merchandise to interested consumers. Most notable perhaps, are the Jewish specific subgraph authority nodes (jewishschool.com, jewlicious.com, jvoices.com), which maintain influential community linkages within the subset, highlighting the loose conceptual boundaries of 'community' in Palestinian virtual space. This contrasts strongly with what conventional triadic approaches to diaspora politics would tell us.

Based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Badil.org (Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights), presents itself as a “community based non-profit organisation.”⁶⁶³ As visible in the website interface below, badil.org maintains authority by providing access to a variety of Palestinian-specific resources. Activists in the homeland use the website to disseminate information on historical origins, ongoing mobilisation activities, publications and legal references. Linking the Palestinian collective identity to international law and human rights, the organisation is spread throughout various social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

Figure 6.7 <http://badil.org/>



Informed by external attracting authority statistics, key corpus authorities are shown to play an important role in structuring the web presence of community-based activity nodes. Statistical data shows that all the external nodes listed are also key corpus authorities.

⁶⁶³ “BADIL – About,” *BADIL, Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights*, last accessed November 2, 2012. <<http://badil.org/en/about-badil>>

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside community
that are cited by the most nodes in community

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM community |
|--|---|
| http://electronicintifada.net/ (news) | 36 |
| http://palsolidarity.org/ (protest) | 27 |
| http://mondoweiss.net/ (policy) | 21 |
| http://bdsmovement.net/ (boycott) | 20 |
| http://palestinemonitor.org/ (news) | 20 |
| http://pchrgaza.org/ (human rights) | 18 |
| http://stopthewall.org/ (protest) | 18 |
| http://palestinechronicle.com/ (news) | 16 |
| http://freegaza.org/ (protest) | 16 |
| http://amnesty.org/ (human rights) | 15 |

For cross comparison see: Top 10 (authoritative) Palestinian diaspora Websites

6.3.4 Palestinian Corpus - Peace Led Advocacy

Figure 6.8 Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Peace

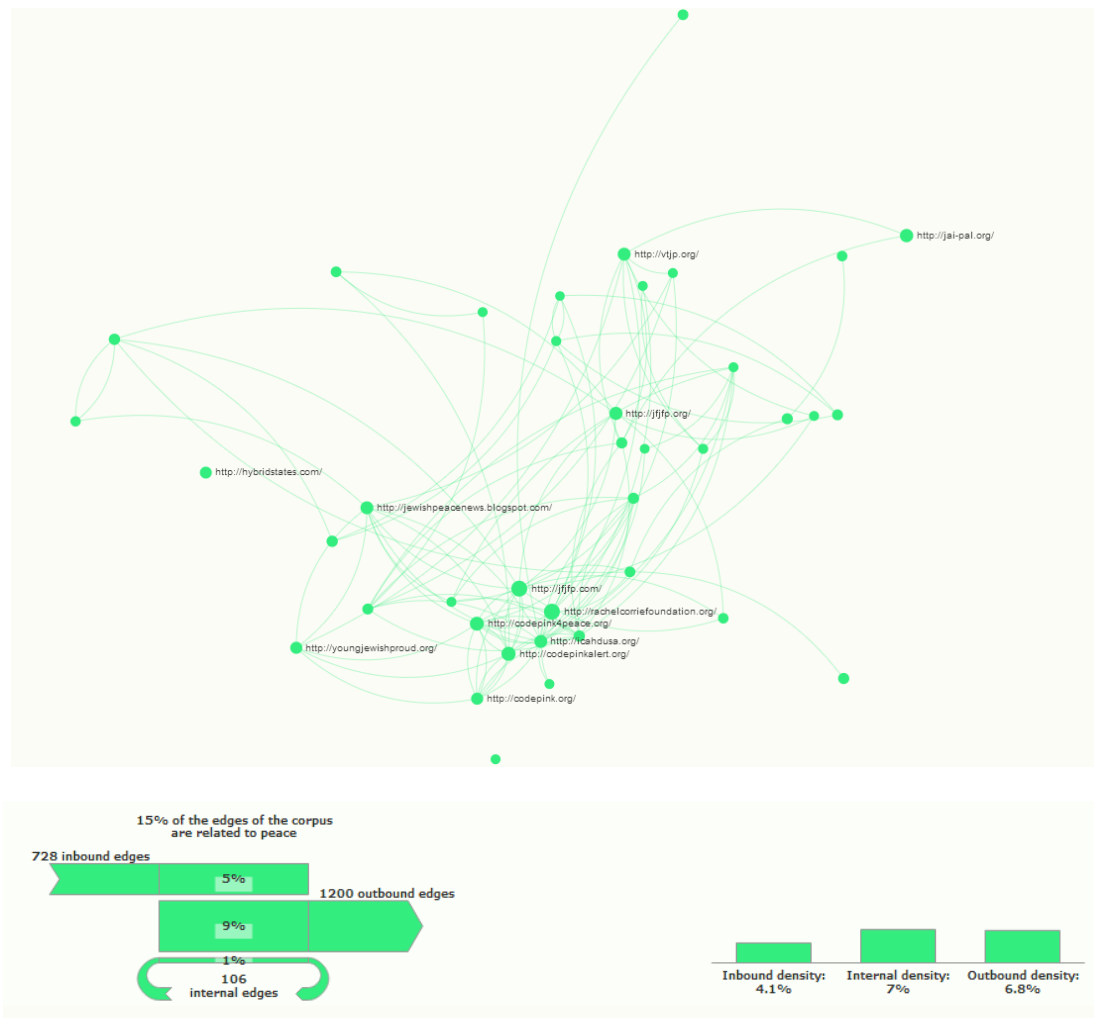


Figure 6.8 is isolated for peace-based websites, which represent 8% of the corpus (39 nodes).⁶⁶⁴ When compared against the Palestinian activity map, we note that nodes cluster at the bottom of the corpus and link into other mobilisation activity networks. Peace nodes maintain an online presence in close proximity to protest, boycott and solidarity activities. Node linkages are notably ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relative to the corpus, signifying outreach. Statistics indicate that internal (7%) and outbound density (6.8%) flows are significantly greater than inbound (4.1%) flow linkages. Websites promoting peace most concretely highlight the blurred conceptual boundaries of Palestinian virtual space. Peace

⁶⁶⁴ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity – Peace.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=5§ion=35&value=peace>>

nodes are ‘cause-based’ and are not bound to the Palestinian community through shared collective identity. Corpus statistics suggest website nodes to be especially active in streamlining engagements between like-minded individuals who share similar normative convictions with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Subgraph and representative authorities highlight a significant presence of Jewish-based peace advocacy, which will be expanded upon in future sections.

Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside peace
that are cited by the most nodes in peace

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM peace |
|---|-----------------------------|
| http://rachelcorriefoundation.org/ | 9 |
| http://icahdusa.org/ | 8 |
| http://jfjfp.com/ | 7 |
| http://jewishpeacenews.blogspot.com/ | 7 |
| http://israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/ | 7 |
| http://codepinkalert.org/ | 6 |
| http://codepink4peace.org/ | 6 |
| http://youngjewishproud.org/ | 5 |
| http://jfjfp.org/ | 5 |
| http://ifpb.org/ | 5 |

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside peace

that are cited by the most nodes in other activity (*primary cause*)

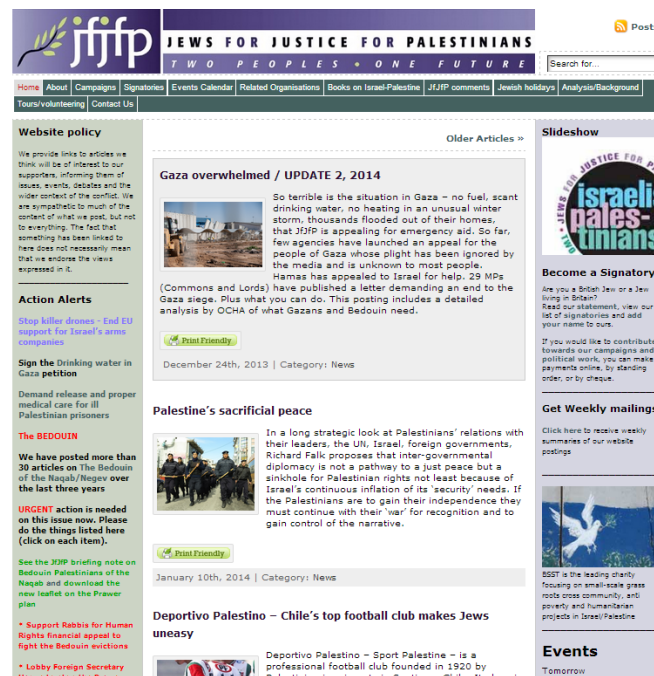
| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://jfjfp.com/ | 66 |
| http://rachelcorriefoundation.org/ | 63 |
| http://codepinkalert.org/ | 47 |
| http://codepink4peace.org/ | 44 |
| http://jai-pal.org/ | 41 |
| http://jfjfp.org/ | 36 |
| http://vtjp.org/ | 35 |
| http://jewishpeacenews.blogspot.com/ | 31 |
| http://icahdusa.org/ | 31 |
| http://hybridstates.com/ | 28 |

Jewish based website nodes (jfjfp.com/org, jewishpeacenews.blogspot.com, youngjewishproud.org) maintain a significant authority within the peace activity subset. As community outsiders, actors moderating these websites are cause-based and advocate for a fair resolution to the ever-expanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Key focal points of discussion include international law, illegal settlements and the status of Palestinian refugees. Jfjfp.com (Jews for Justice for Palestinians) functions as a network bridge, linking external nodes with peace-based nodes. With comparable inbound (73) and outbound (80) flows, neighbour exploration results further confirm the node's bridging and disseminating qualities in the corpus network.

Jfjfp.com Neighbours⁶⁶⁵

| Referees (Nodes that cite http://jfjfp.com/) | Mutually linked neighbours (Nodes that cite and are cited by http://jfjfp.com/) | Cited (Nodes that are cited by http://jfjfp.com/) |
|--|--|--|
| 73 → | ↑ 17 ↓ | 80 → |

Figure 6.9 <http://jfjfp.com/>



As visible in the website interface shown in Figure 6.9, audiences are invited to engage in Jfjfp under the rationale and mindset of “Two Peoples, One Future.”⁶⁶⁶ With appeals for support explicitly directed to individuals in the UK who define themselves as Jewish,

⁶⁶⁵Jfjfp.com Corpus Node Exploration.

<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=86&map=68&node=191§ion=35>>

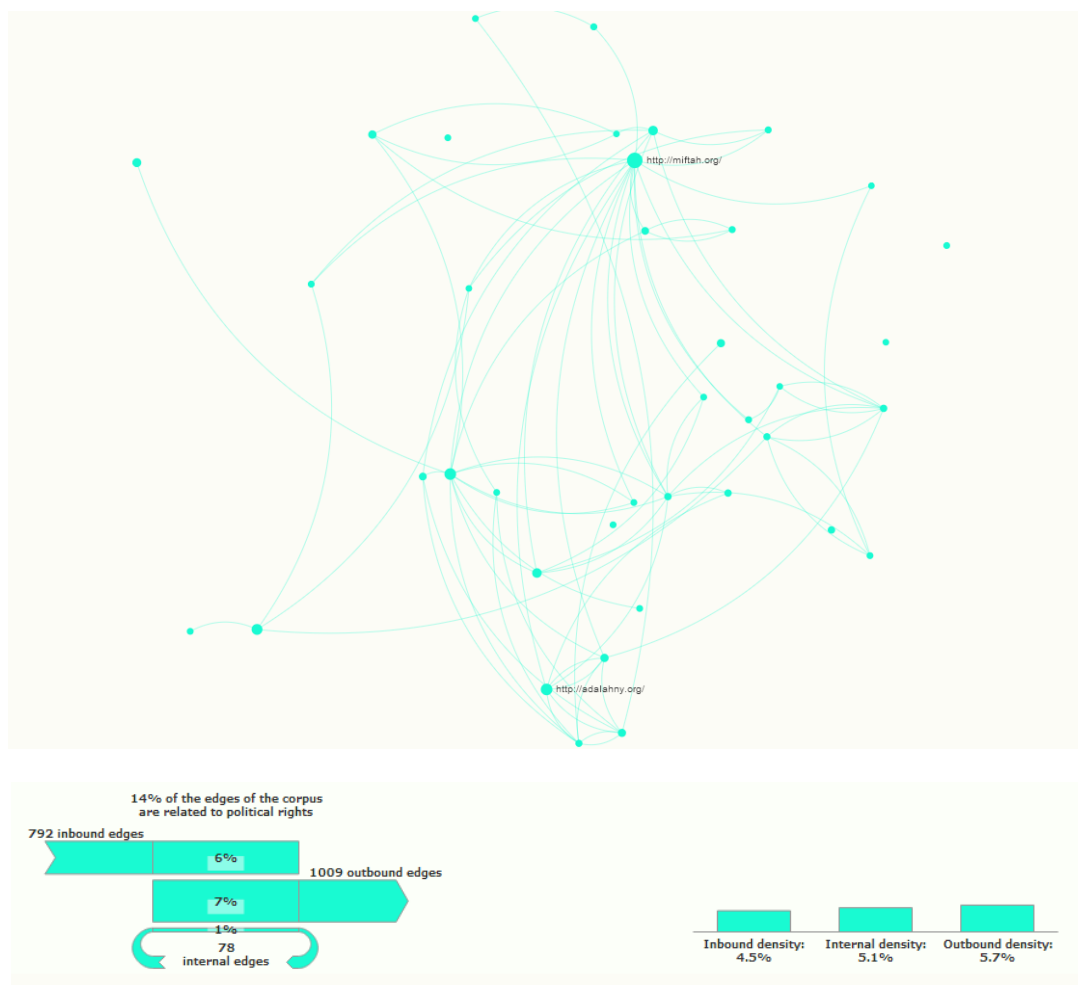
⁶⁶⁶ “Jews for Justice for Palestinians,” last accessed October 1, 2014.

<<http://jfjfp.com/>>

moderators of Jfjfp ask audiences, “[a]re you a British Jew or a Jew living in Britain?” (Become a Signatory). Audiences have access to a plethora of networked activities including mutually supported campaigns, related organisations, Jewish holidays, and volunteering opportunities. Emphasising long-term peace and resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, engagements link supporters from the ground to the transnational.

6.3.5 Palestinian Corpus - Restoring Political Rights

Figure 6.10 Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Political Rights



Political rights-based corpus activities further highlight the conceptually fluid boundaries of Palestinian virtual space. Representing only 8% of the corpus (39 nodes), Figure 6.10 is

isolated for the subset activity linkages.⁶⁶⁷ When compared to the overall Palestinian activity map, we note that nodes based in political rights are minimally clustered and are loosely scattered throughout the corpus. The blurred lines between ‘cause-based’ engagements and collective identity representations are further obscured when considering the link flow between website nodes.

With an outbound density of 5.7%, nodes based in political rights maintain an ‘in deficit’ (inbound<outbound) relationship with external corpus activities. Statistics indicate internal links to be particularly dense (5.1%), highlighting significant cross-referencing between subset nodes. As indicated by representative authority linkages (prominent subset nodes), articulations of ‘political rights’ assume a variety of connotations within the corpus.

Representative Authorities

Nodes *inside* political rights

that *are cited* by the most nodes in *other* activity (*primary cause*)

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://miftah.org/ | 137 |
| http://adalahny.org/ | 83 |
| http://australiansforpalestine.com/ | 77 |
| http://theonlydemocracy.org/ | 69 |
| http://kairopalestine.ps/ | 48 |
| http://www.prc.org.uk/ | 44 |
| http://zionism-israel.com/ | 41 |
| http://uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.com/ | 29 |

⁶⁶⁷ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Political Rights.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=5§ion=35&value=political%2Brights>>

| | |
|---|----|
| http://palestineinformation.org/ | 28 |
| http://resist.ca/ | 28 |

This opens the idea that the above representative authorities are diverse in their approaches to political rights. Online representations streamline normative political convictions through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In hopes of restoring political rights for local Palestinian populations, moderators of Miftah.org promote dialogue between official and non-governmental bodies globally. Actors involved in kairospalestine.ps (Palestinian Christians) and prc.org.uk (Palestinian Return Centre) conversely root political rights to Palestinian land and refugees within the region. This differs considerably from zionism-israel.com, a website that focuses on the maintenance and restoration of Israeli political rights. While website moderators' position claim differently, external attracting authorities show that overall the subset reinforces the authority of key corpus network structures.

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes *outside* political rights

that are cited by the most nodes in political rights

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM political rights |
|--|--|
| http://electronicintifada.net/ (news) | 35 |
| http://bdsmovement.net/ (boycott) | 25 |
| http://stopthewall.org/ (protest) | 22 |
| http://ifamericansknew.org/ (news) | 22 |
| http://badil.org/ (community) | 19 |
| http://freegaza.org/ (protest) | 19 |
| http://palestinechronicle.com/ (news) | 17 |
| http://pchrgaza.org/ (human rights) | 17 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://endtheoccupation.org/ (lobby) | 17 |
| http://al-awda.org/ (human rights) | 16 |

Highlighted above: key corpus authorities (for full list see Top 10 (authoritative) Palestinian diaspora Websites)

6.3.6 Palestinian Corpus - Protest Coordination and Mobilisation

Figure 6.11 Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Protest

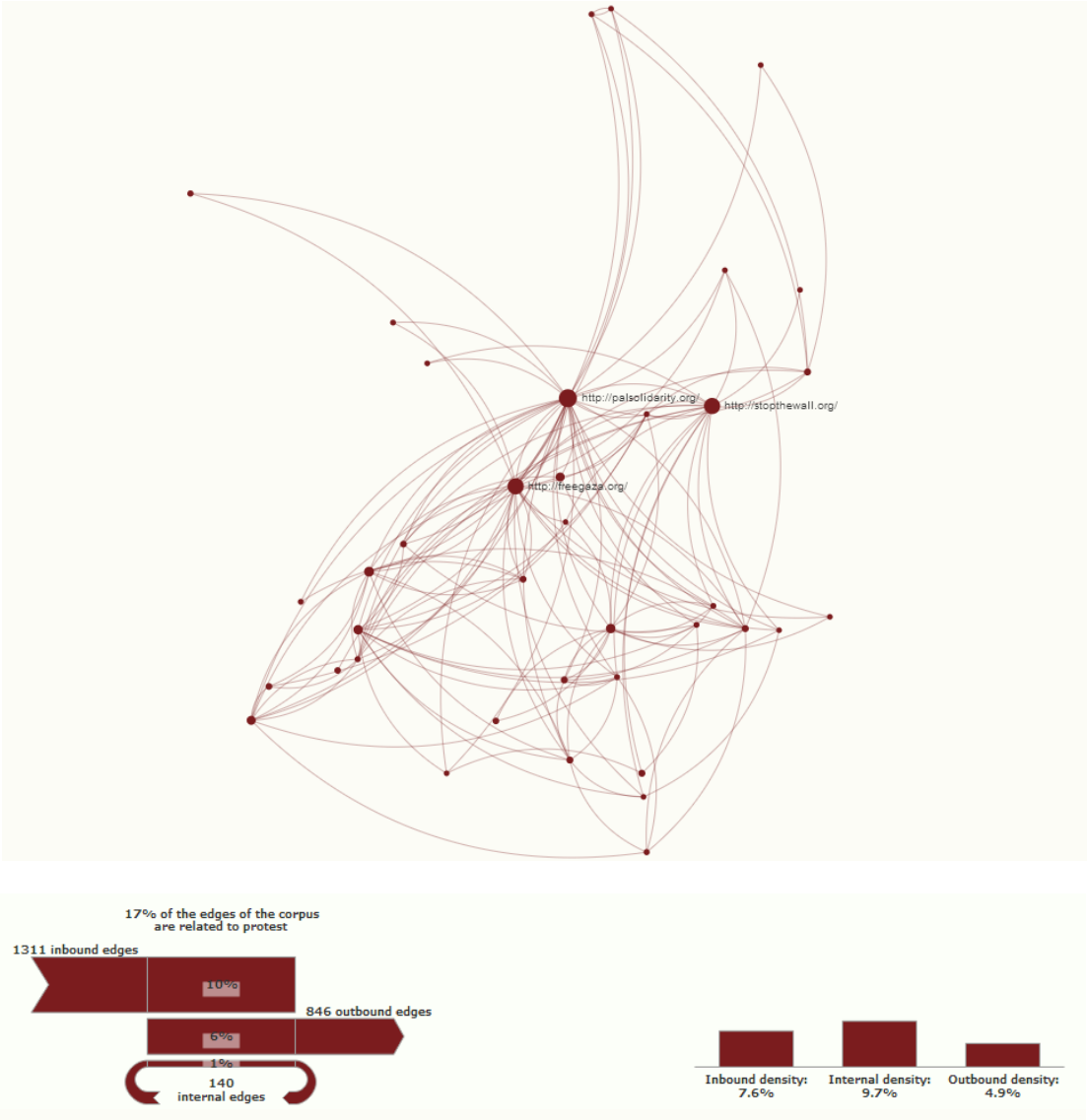
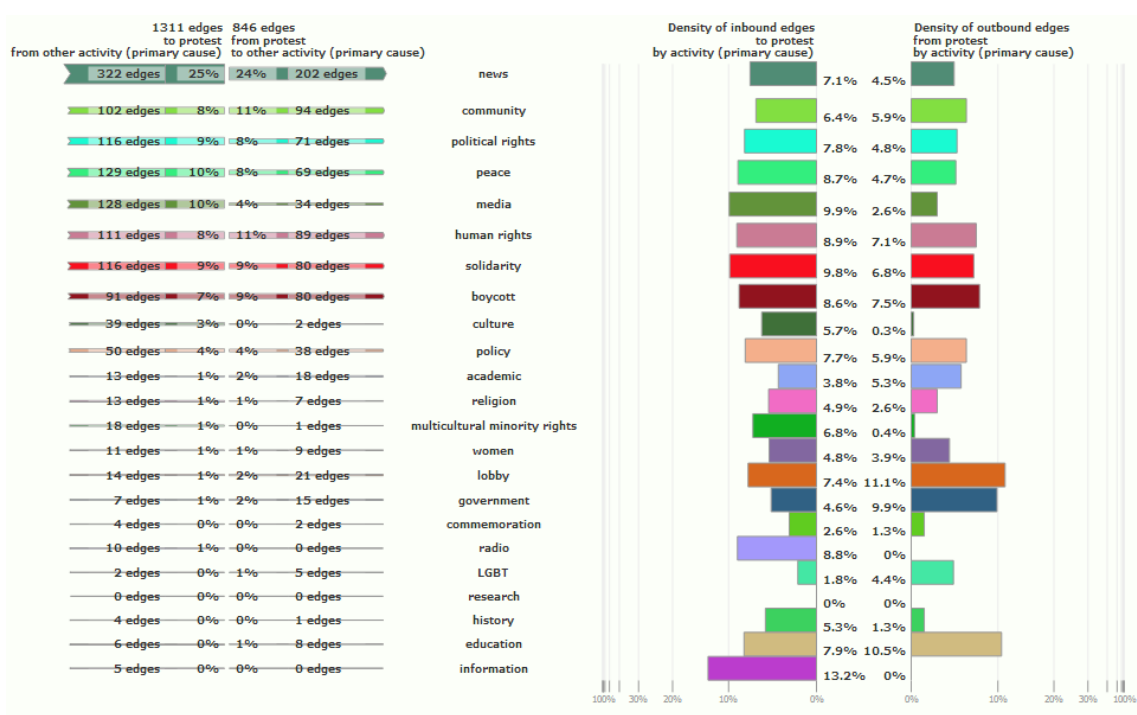


Figure 6.11 is isolated for protest node linkages, representing 8% of the corpus (39 nodes). Online activity based in protest, maintain an ‘in profit’ (inbound>outbound) relationship with

external nodes (inbound density 7.6%).⁶⁶⁸ Key node linkages direct the scattered structure of the subset between the centre and bottom of the corpus. Subset linkages are internally dense (9.7%), suggesting protest activity to indeed, be horizontally networked online. This is only further confirmed when considering that key corpus activities characteristically link in to peace-based activity website nodes, which again focus on mobilising around issues in the Palestinian homeland. Insight into the disseminating capabilities of the subset requires a more in depth analysis of external flow patterns.

Figure 6.12 Palestinian Corpus Protest Hyperlink Flow (edges)



Corpus statistics indicate protest to maintain especially significant ‘in profit’ relationships with news, community, political rights, peace, media, human rights, solidarity, and boycott. Links flow inward from each of these key external subsets, underlining the authority of protest websites in guiding online mobilisation processes. Subgraph and representative authorities highlight prominent protest nodes, which through their influential web presence streamline and disseminate calls to action throughout Palestinian virtual space.

⁶⁶⁸ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Activity - Protest. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=5§ion=35&value=protest>>

Subgraph Authorities

*Nodes inside protest
that are cited by the most nodes in protest*

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM protest |
|---|-------------------------------|
| http://palsolidarity.org/ | 25 |
| http://stopthewall.org/ | 18 |
| http://freegaza.org/ | 18 |
| http://popularstruggle.org/ | 11 |
| http://apartheidweek.org/ | 9 |
| http://gazafreedommarch.org/ | 6 |
| http://ustogaza.org/ | 6 |
| http://protection-palestine.org/ | 5 |
| http://ism-london.org.uk/ | 5 |
| http://palestinesolidarityproject.org/ | 5 |

Representative Authorities

*Nodes inside protest
that are cited by the most nodes in other activity (primary cause)*

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause) |
|---|---|
| http://palsolidarity.org/ | 230 |
| http://stopthewall.org/ | 200 |
| http://freegaza.org/ | 199 |

| | |
|---|----|
| http://gazafreedommarch.org/ | 82 |
| http://apartheidweek.org/ | 73 |
| http://popularstruggle.org/ | 67 |
| http://palestinesolidarityproject.org/ | 66 |
| http://ustogaza.org/ | 64 |
| http://stopthejnf.org/ | 28 |
| http://itisapartheid.org/ | 25 |

Protest authorities clearly frame engagements through rights-based discourse linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Domain names reinforce Palestinian mobilisation narratives through the explicit use of grievance specific terminology (solidarity, freedom, struggle, apartheid). This includes reference to on the ground homeland realities (the separation wall and the Gaza Strip). The evidence here suggests that it is the themes, activities and issues that make up diaspora politics, rather than any specific person. Protest linkages signal active mobilisation between and within online-offline environments and for this reason maintains an especially influential presence within the corpus.

6.4 The Palestinian Blogosphere

The above findings present a snapshot of Palestinian virtual space. Beyond mapping activity, efforts were equally placed on distinguishing between conventional websites (characterised by thematic focus and splash style imagery) and blog interfaces (expressive web logs mimicking personal journals). Through systematic analysis, I have aimed to show that Internet 2.0 technologies empower everyday people, with connective opportunities of expression. Corpus nodes were classified by type of website⁶⁶⁹ to gain a more detailed visual representation of the Palestinian blogosphere.

Blogs were identified through domain references, the details of which are discussed in the methodology section of this study. Cognisant of anonymity, personalised web

⁶⁶⁹ Nodes were classified by type of website, actor, activity, secondary activity, language, location. Type of website classifications: site, blog, news group, forum site, social network.

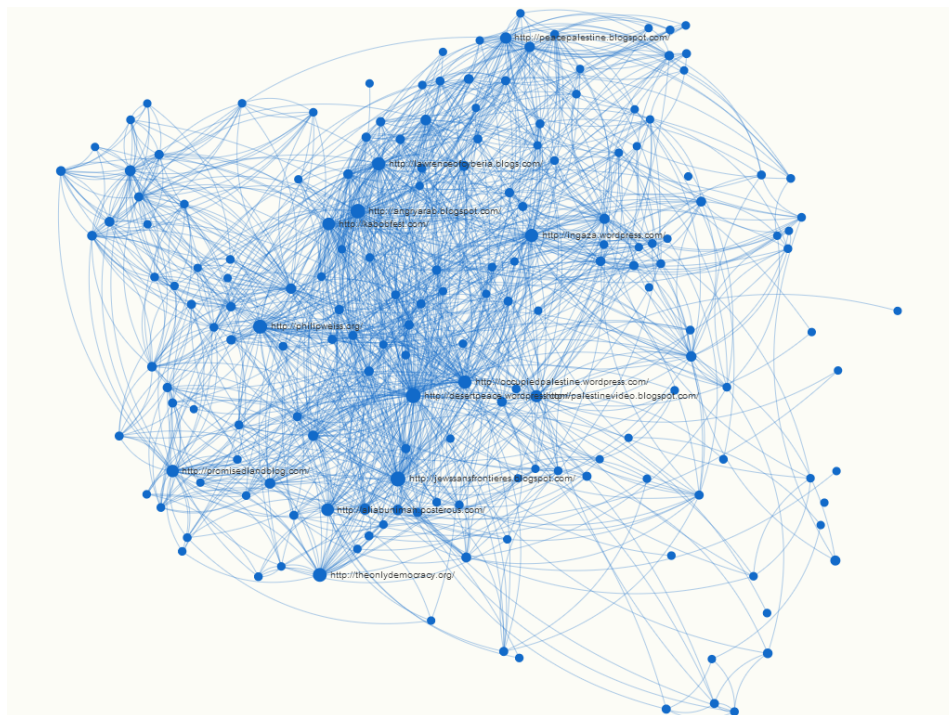
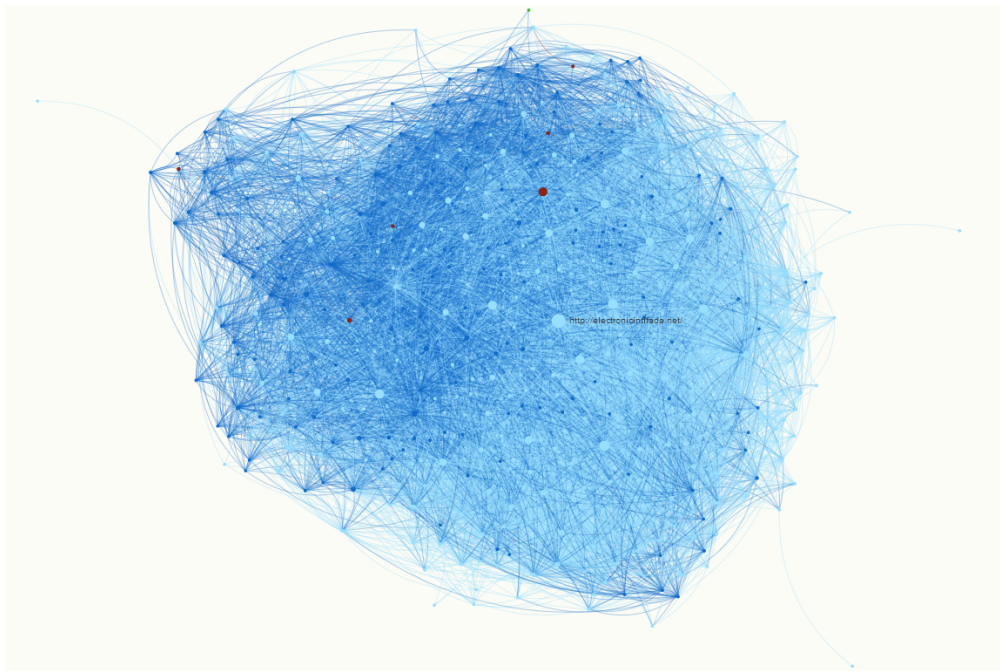
platforms (wordpress, blogspot and tumblr), unless self-defined, were understood as clear indication of blogging activities. Blogs allow online actors to inform audiences of their daily realities, which in the case of the Palestinian blogosphere often include opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Individuals who maintain blogs provide access to voices on the ground that are characteristically framed by normative political convictions.

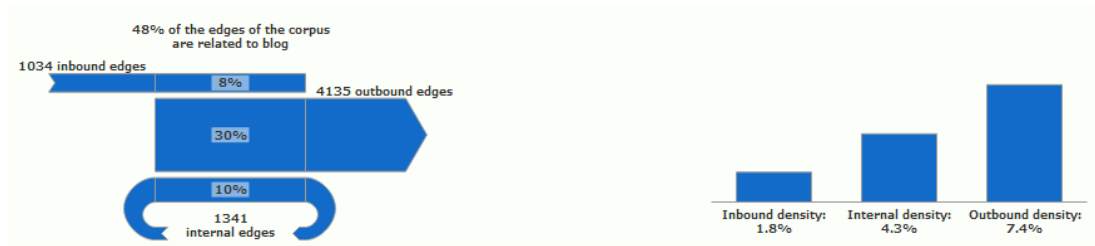
The corpus map in Figure 6.13 is classified by type of website⁶⁷⁰, with blogs maintaining much of their presence in the centre-left of the corpus. When compared against the Palestinian activity map, we note that the majority of blogs steer clear of explicit solidarity or boycott activities. The Palestinian blogosphere, as isolated below, provides a more detailed account of node linkages within the corpus subset. Corpus statistics indicate that blogs account for some 36% (177 blogs) of all Palestinian nodes.⁶⁷¹ With 48% of the corpus maintaining linkages with blog nodes, the Palestinian blogosphere maintains an influential web presence. Characteristic of most blogging networks, corpus statistics highlight a disproportionate number of links flowing outward to external websites (4135 outbound linkages compared to 1034 inbound linkages).

⁶⁷⁰ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Website.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=3§ion=35>>

⁶⁷¹ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Website - Blog.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=3§ion=35&value=blog>>
Conventional websites and news group sites account for 49% and 20% of nodes respectively.

Figure 6.13 Palestinian Corpus - Type of Website - Blog





Corpus statistics reveal prominent blogging activities to be based in news (37%, 66 nodes), media (11%, 19 nodes), community (8%, 14 nodes), culture (6%, 11 nodes), political rights (6%, 10 nodes) and protest (6%, 10 nodes).

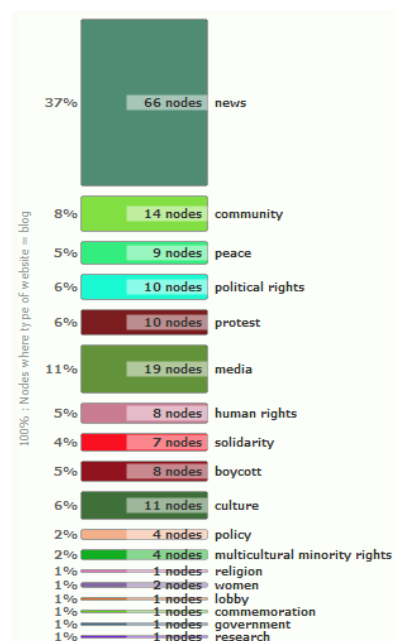


Figure 6.14 Corpus Blog Statistics

Blogs maintain minimal authority within the corpus, but are instrumental in bridging different activity networks. Signifying their relational nature, corpus blogs are informed by virtual content collected from external web nodes. Bloggers filter and tailor their posts to audiences who share like-minded values and similar political beliefs. Representative authority statistics, for example, highlight the fact that prominent blogs characteristically pin web presence to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Discussions of the homeland issue agendas are contextualised through Palestinian-specific rights-based discourse, appealing to a political cause as opposed to diaspora community members specifically.

Representative Authorities

Nodes inside blog

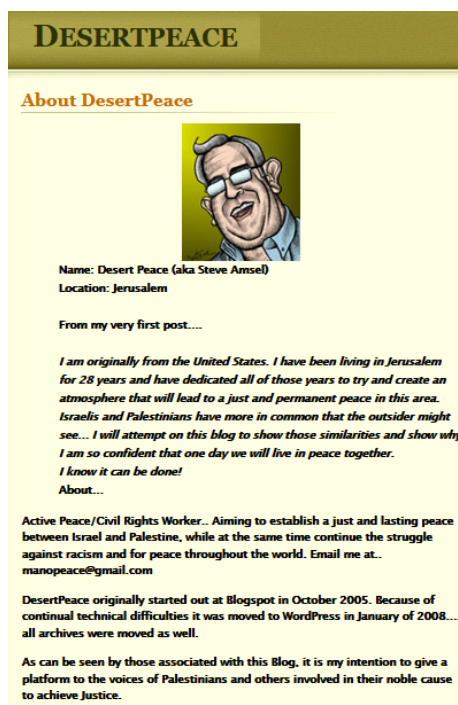
that are cited by the most nodes in other type of website

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM other type of website |
|---|--|
| http://jewssansfrontieres.blogspot.com/ | 46 |
| http://theonlydemocracy.org/ | 44 |
| http://desertpeace.wordpress.com/ | 39 |
| http://philipweiss.org/ | 36 |
| http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/ | 33 |
| http://ingaza.wordpress.com/ | 30 |
| http://promisedlandblog.com/ | 29 |
| http://angryarab.blogspot.com/ | 27 |
| http://palestinevideo.blogspot.com/ | 27 |
| http://aliabunimah.posterous.com/ | 25 |

Representative authority blogs, while informed by conflict in the homeland, vary significantly in the focus and aims of online advocacy. Under the screen name ‘Desert Peace’, blogger Steve Amsel presents an especially personalised weblog, which he explains to be an extension of his daily work as a civil rights activist. Introducing himself as an American expat living in Jerusalem, Amsel advocates for lasting peace through empowered open dialogue, stating “it is my intention to give a platform to the voices of Palestinians” and provides audiences with his direct email contact details.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷² Steve Amsel, “About Desert Peace,” *Desert Peace* (Blog), last accessed June 6, 2014.
<<http://desertpeace.wordpress.com/about/>>

Figure 6.15 <http://desertpeace.wordpress.com/>



Corpus findings reveal that within the blog subset, <http://desertpeace.wordpress.com> cites the greatest number of external websites (105 links). The personalised weblog maintains its authority by providing audiences with an archive repository of virtual resources. Website links are organised by topic and include 'Blogroll' (Boycott Updates), 'Blogs for Palestine' (+972 Magazine, Occupied Palestine), 'Blogs I follow' (Promised Land, Angry Arab), 'My News Links' (Al Jazeera, Electronic Intifada) and 'Nakba Documents'.⁶⁷³

Similar dissemination patterns are observed for 'Occupied Palestine' (<http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com>), a professionalised human rights blog most notably focused on Palestinian struggles against unlawful Israeli occupation. As a representative authority and diffusing hub, 'Occupied Palestine' is comparatively less personalised, and places greater emphasis on social media platforms to build and expand its web presence. Secondary Facebook and Twitter pages (both established in 2011) serve as key communicative channels, facilitating interaction between supporters and blog moderators.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

Audiences are invited to share unlisted blogs and websites that support the ‘Palestinian cause’ by tweeting relevant links to @occpal.⁶⁷⁴ Moderators explain that in an effort to curtail hate speech and racism, the comment section of the weblog interface is intentionally disabled:

“To prevent either Anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, Holocaust/Nakba denial remarks; Islam/Muslim, Judaism/Jews, Christianity/Christian-Bashing, Sexism, Bigotry or otherwise offending content, there is no possibility here to comment on posts.”⁶⁷⁵

Figure 6.16 <http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/>

Occupied Palestine | فلسطين
BLOGGING 4 HUMAN RIGHTS & LIBERATION OF PALESTINE | فلسطين

The Sole & Common Enemy of Middle East- World Peace & Co-Existence is called: Zionism

If you admin or own a blog or website supporting the Palestinian cause and it is not listed below, please send a tweet to @occpal

United Bloggers, Activists, (Human) Rights Organisations, Solidarity & News from and for Palestine

| (Pro) Palestinian Bloggers | Activism Human Rights Solidarity | News Resources from & about Palestine |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 Minutes to Palestine Blog • 48Refugee weblog • AdamAkkad • A Jihad For Love Parvez Sharma • Al-Multaqa: The Arab Thought Forum • A Mother from Gaza • AFOPA Adelaide • AJPP Canberra • Alan Hart • Ali Abunimah • Aloha Palestine Ken O'Keefe • American Palestinian New Generation • Anas Hamra from Gaza • Anja Meulenbelt • Angry Arabs • Another World is Possible • Anti is Good • Antony Loewenstein • Arab Agenda from Palestine • Arab Revolution • ArabRevolt • Association of 40 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +972 Magazine • ActiveStills.org • Addameer Prisoner Support & HR • Ahavat Olam • Airlotilla2 Action Blog • Al Awda New York • Al-Haq • Anarchists against the Wall • An-Najah University • Arab Association For Human Rights • ARJ Towards a sustainable Palestine • Asociacion Vittorio Arrigoni Málaga • Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children Gaza • Atfaluna Crafts Shop Support Atfaluna • BADIL • Bangpound • BDS on Youtube • BDS BDS Movement • BDS BDS Nederland • BDS BIN Boycot Israel Network • BDS Boycot Israel • BDS Corporate Watch NEW • BDS Geneva Suisse • BDS In Minds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al-Bab English • Al-Manar عربي • Al-Ray عربي • Al-Ray English • Al-Resalah English • Al-Resalah عربي • Alternative Information Center English • AntiWar.Com English • Arab News Middle East English • Arabs48 • Al-Qassam English • Al-Qassam عربي • Al-Qassam Turkish • Al-Quds عربي • Bethlehem News English • CounterPunch English • DFLP English • Dissident Voice English • DRAH English • DRAH عربي • Electronic Intifada English • Felestin عربي |

⁶⁷⁴ “Occupied Palestine – About,” *Occupied Palestine* (Blog), last accessed June 6, 2014.

<<http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/about/>>

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

In maintaining the blog interface, moderators place significant emphasis on providing detailed access to external virtual resources ((Pro) Palestinian Bloggers, Activism, Human Rights, Solidarity). This includes an extensive list of ‘Must follows on Twitter’ (notable usernames: @activestills, @BrazilPalestine, @EnglishPal, @GazaNews_Brk, @GazaGram, @Gazahere, @gazaheart, @Gazanism, @ThisIsGaza, @TeamPalestina). Personalised social media channels are integral to the daily upkeep of ‘Occupied Palestine’. The #GazaUnderAttack hashtag for example, is used to streamline content between the weblog, Twitter and Facebook pages, and provides audiences with multiple decentralised and asynchronous access points to supplementary resources.

Diffusing Hubs

Nodes inside blog

that cite the most nodes in other type of website

| Node name | Outbound edges TO other type of website |
|---|--|
| http://desertpeace.wordpress.com/ | 105 |
| http://wideasleepinamerica.com/ | 79 |
| http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/ | 79 |
| http://cifwatch.com/ | 62 |
| http://filasteen.wordpress.com/ | 60 |
| http://boycottzionism.wordpress.com/ | 59 |
| http://endisraeliapartheid.blogspot.com/ | 58 |
| http://bodyontheline.wordpress.com/ | 53 |
| http://alethonews.wordpress.com/ | 50 |
| http://angryarabscommentsection.blogspot.com/ | 49 |

Diffusing hubs substantiate their claims by actively linking in to external virtual resources. To be clear, citations are not always linked to pro-Palestinian websites. Instead, as indicated by corpus statistics, activists use weblogs to support and enable representations of alternative perspectives that challenge and dominant Palestinian narratives. Highlighting the flexible boundaries of Palestinian virtual space, we note that diffusing hubs ‘CiF Watch’ and ‘Wide Asleep in America’ link in to corpus nodes however differ significantly in terms of their thematic focus.

Figure 6.17 <http://www.wideasleepinamerica.com/>



‘Wide Asleep in America’ aims to tackle mainstream media’s portrayal of global political affairs with specific reference to Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, US based foreign policy.⁶⁷⁶ Blogger Nima Shirazi introduces himself as an independent researcher and political analyst committed to exposing government propaganda, stating, “the writing published on Wide Asleep in America is proudly dedicated to promoting human rights, international law, and peace with justice. It strives, above all, to tell the truth.”⁶⁷⁷ In exposing the pitfalls of mainstream political media, Shirazi seeks to fill knowledge gaps and educate the public of ‘misinformed’ news headlines.⁶⁷⁸ Notable scholars and journalists endorse the blog as an informative virtual resource for issues pertaining to Iran and the Middle East

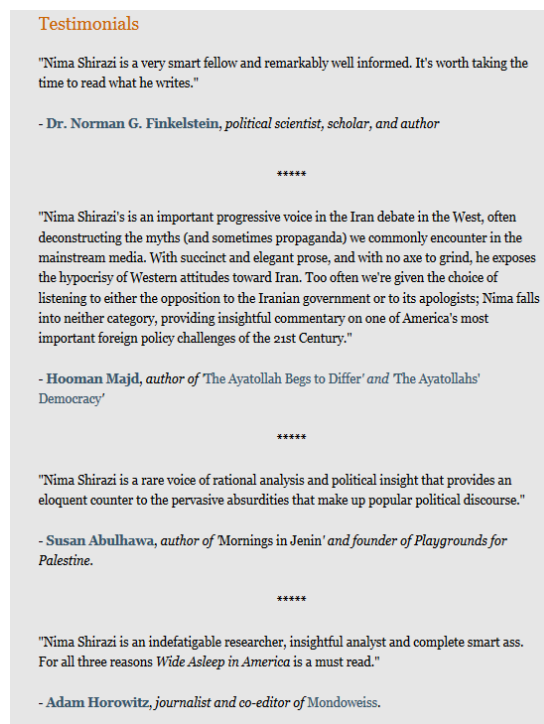
⁶⁷⁶ Nima Shirazi, “Wide Asleep America – Why,” *Wide Asleep America* (Blog), last accessed June, 8, 2014. <<http://www.wideasleepinamerica.com/p/why.html>>

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ See <http://www.wideasleepinamerica.com/p/article-index.html#IsPal> for complete list. Selected posts: “Rachel Maddow and Chemical Weapons: Inaccurate Information & Telling Omissions (August 21, 2013), “Smiles and Denials: Official Israeli and Iranian Statements Demonstrate a Double Standard” (July 24, 2012), “Israel: Still not doing Gandhi very well (October 1, 2012), “The “Deplorable” Acts: The ‘Quartet’ Comments on Gaza” (July 2, 2011).

through publicly displayed testimonials. These endorsements are meant to legitimise Shirazi's web presence and overall dedication to rigorous political analysis.

Figure 6.18 Wide Asleep in America Testimonials



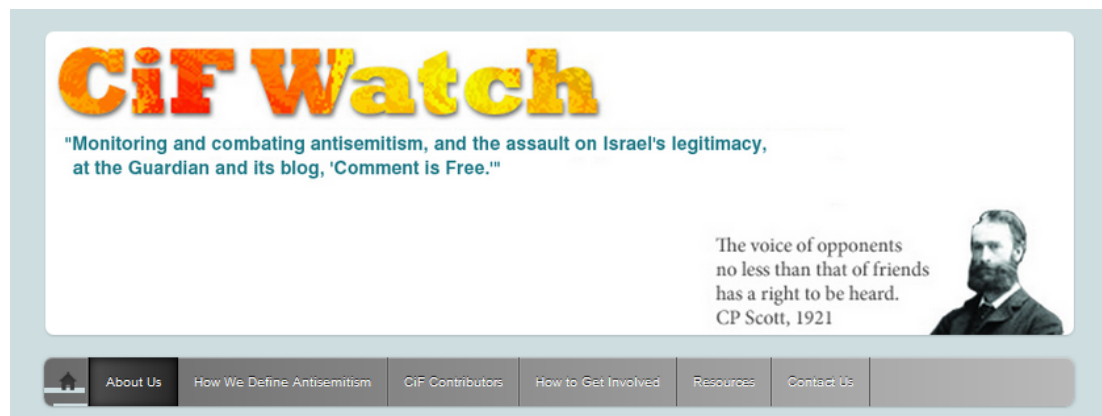
This differs greatly from 'CiF Watch', a blog dedicated to raising awareness of the alleged anti-Semitism hidden in mainstream media news reports. As a diffusing hub, 'CiF Watch' serves as a virtual watchdog, pulling together external news resources to highlight the perpetual media bias against Israel and the Jewish community. A moderator from 'CiF Watch' explained, "we are trying to expose that anti-Semitism and the assault on Israel's legitimacy at the Guardian. You can call that advocacy, we like to think of it more as media monitoring."⁶⁷⁹ 'CiF' refers to the Guardian's 'Comment is Free' blog, which stands accused of providing an open platform for anti-Semitic hate speech and bigotry.

In questioning the legitimacy of the mainstream news outlet, the moderators allege the Guardian to negatively influence public opinion by disproportionately focusing on Israel in its coverage of the Middle East. Noting the growing web presence of 'CiF Watch', the

⁶⁷⁹ Author interview with CiF Watch administrator on 4 April 2012, Israel (via Skype).

interviewee noted, “our traffic has grown significantly, these algorithms don’t lie, our blogging platform tells us how many hits we get a day.”⁶⁸⁰ The interviewee added that while the web had provided an alternative platform to address anti-Semitism, the contentious nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had sometimes led to incidents of hate mail, “when we get hostile messages, death threats, we can trace the IP address at least to a city. In general we don’t bother, people are relatively anonymous.”⁶⁸¹

Figure 6.19 <http://cifwatch.com/about/>



⁶⁸⁰ Author interview with CiF Watch administrator on 4 April 2012, Israel (via Skype).

⁶⁸¹ Author interview with CiF Watch administrator on 4 April 2012, Israel (via Skype).

cifwatch.com Neighbours⁶⁸²

(**partial results - full list found online)

| Referees <i>(Nodes that cite http://cifwatch.com)</i> 30 → | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by ↑ http://cifwatch.com ↓)</i> 16 | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://cifwatch.com)</i> 87 → |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://youngjewishproud.org/ • http://daledamos.blogspot.com/ • http://yayacanada.blogspot.com/ • http://contentious-centrist.blogspot.com/ • http://richardmillet.wordpress.com/ • http://afopa.squarespace.com/ • http://antonylerman.com/ • http://gaza.tumblr.com/ • http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/ • http://bienvenuepalestine.com/ • http://calevbenyefuneh.blogspot.com/ • http://zionism-israel.com/ • http://jews4big.wordpress.com/ • http://israel-palestijnen.blogspot.com/ • http://alethonews.wordpress.com/ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://daledamos.blogspot.com/ • http://richardmillet.wordpress.com/ • http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/ • http://bienvenuepalestine.com/ • http://calevbenyefuneh.blogspot.com/ • http://zionism-israel.com/ • http://israel-palestijnen.blogspot.com/ • http://desertpeace.wordpress.com/ • http://fresnozionism.org/ • http://camera.org/ • http://israel-in-de-media.blogspot.com/ • http://ziontruth.blogspot.com/ • http://yaacovlozowick.blogspot.com/ • http://mideastparalleluniverse.blogspot.com/ • http://engageonline.wordpress.com/ • http://simplyjews.blogspot.com/ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://bricup.org.uk/ • http://gazafreedommarch.org/ • http://stolenbeauty.org/ • http://bdsmovement.net/ • http://daledamos.blogspot.com/ • http://philipweiss.org/ • http://rachelcorriefoundation.org/ • http://campalsoc.org/ • http://www.benwhite.org.uk/ • http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ • http://ngo-monitor.org/ • http://ism-london.org.uk/ • http://richardmillet.wordpress.com/ • http://palwatch.org/ • http://pmrs.ps/ • http://palestinechronicle.com/ |

⁶⁸² Cifwatch.com Corpus Node Exploration.
<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=86&map=68&node=466§ion=35>>

In exposing virtual anti-Semitism, CiF Watch⁶⁸³ cites many pro-Palestinian websites (gazafreedommarch.org, bdsmovement.net, ism-london.org.uk, palestinechronicle.com). Moving away from the binary that does not fit with the horizontal structure of the web, the interviewee explained, “we try and win over people in the middle, we’re always trying to keep our blog relevant for people who are not far right or left and are fairly open-minded.”⁶⁸⁴ Neighbour exploration results confirm Palestinian virtual space to be largely defined by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which explains why the Jewish advocacy blog networks find their way into the corpus.

Not one of the top ten Palestinian corpus authorities presented at the beginning of this section was defined as a blog. Instead, as indicated by external outbound linkages, blogs play a key role in (re)circulating and reflection on web content of corpus authorities. Overall, corpus blogs highlight the fact that Palestinian virtual space is well immersed in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

External Attracting Authorities

Nodes *outside* blog that *are cited* by the most nodes *in* blog

| Node name | Inbound edges FROM blog |
|--|----------------------------|
| http://electronicintifada.net/ (site) | 158 |
| http://palsolidarity.org/ (site) | 104 |
| http://mondoweiss.net/ (site) | 103 |
| http://bdsmovement.net/ (site) | 96 |
| http://palestinechronicle.com/ (news group) | 93 |
| http://freegaza.org/ (site) | 93 |
| http://amnesty.org/ (site) | 88 |

⁶⁸³ Adam Levick, “Comment is Free Watch,” *CiFWatch* (Blog), last accessed July 9, 2014.
<<http://cifwatch.com/about/>>

⁶⁸⁴ Author interview with CiF Watch administrator on 4 April 2012, Israel (via Skype).

| | |
|--|----|
| http://pchrgaza.org/ (site) | 78 |
| http://ifamericansknew.org/ (site) | 71 |
| http://palestinemonitor.org/ (site) | 70 |

Highlighted above: key corpus authorities (for full list see Top 10 (authoritative Palestinian diaspora Websites))

6.5 Contextualising Palestinian Virtual Space

Results obtained from the web-based content analysis⁶⁸⁵ further demonstrate the conflation between representations of Palestinian collective identity and the Palestinian political cause online. The sample corpus nodes (40 websites) are used to aggregate the Palestinian ‘diaspora’ politics being communicated online. The results show that representations of collective Palestinian identity most concretely focus on issue agendas and homeland politics and do not mimic essentialist, nation-state containers of diaspora politics. This suggests a new form of diaspora politics at work—a form that is not inherently bound to identity, territory or the old triadic nexus. Findings suggest that the web functions as a mechanism for mobilisation, which empowers and supports everyday people in the occupied territories who would otherwise remain marginalised from world affairs. Due to the contentious nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, non-Palestinian activists use online platforms to organise transnationally and coordinate actions on the ground.

Frequently employed words in the Palestinian Corpus

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Rights | 679 |
| Occupation | 342 |
| Campaign | 313 |
| Human rights | 289 |
| Support | 284 |

⁶⁸⁵ See: Appendix A: Content Analysis – Sample Websites and Appendix B: Content Analysis Results.

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Apartheid | 238 |
| Boycott | 236 |
| Solidarity | 222 |
| Justice | 215 |
| Resistance | 156 |



Figure 6.20 Common Words Found in the Palestinian Corpus

The web provides a connective opportunity for activists to raise awareness of the dire conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories more publicly (key words: occupation, human rights). Content analysis results predictably confirm that online activities revolve around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of Palestine. Online actors mobilise around issues in the Palestinian homeland, as evidenced by the extensive reference to collective action throughout the corpus (key words: support, solidarity, campaign, resistance).

The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign maintains a significant presence online (keywords: apartheid, boycott), and is a notable example of non-violent transnational political mobilisation in which the Internet is used as an instrument to affect offline politics. The global campaign calls on the international community to challenge Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land through economic, political and cultural pressure. Celebrated victories are widely publicised online, and have served to strengthen

and diversify global campaign networks. I contend that the nimble and flexible nature of user-centred technologies help in providing structure to an otherwise loose and leaderless issue-based global movement.

Content analysis findings, as opposed to primordial approaches, also highlight the lack of community-bound representations of Palestinian identity online. Community grievances are articulated through human rights-based language, that reframes appeals for justice not just as a Palestinian issue, but instead as an issue of global politics. In raising awareness of homeland oppression, online actors look well beyond primordial national boundaries, using the web to direct their appeals to global audiences whilst countering theoretical and methodological assumptions guiding triadic assumptions. It is the loose transnational network of activists who support Palestinian rights irrespective of ancestral origins that make up the online representations of the Palestinian community. Identity-based diasporic representations are minimal, thus questioning the conceptual boundaries of Palestinian online identity politics. To this point, we note that majority of online actors interviewed, defined themselves as ‘career activists’ and explained that they supported a variety of bottom up advocacy campaigns aside from the Palestine cause.

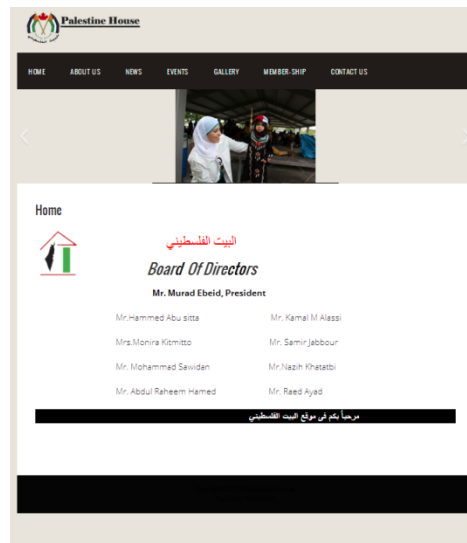
6.6 Actor Reflections: Mobilising Palestinian Solidarity Online

6.6.1 Palestinian Online Advocacy: Disentangling Community from Politics

Palestinian virtual space provides an information portal that enables supporters of the cause to stay more readily informed on homeland issues in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As confirmed by respondent interviews, politics overshadows ethnic identity and layers of community-based engagements online. Differentiating transnational solidarity networks from community-led engagements for example, a representative for Palestine House in Toronto noted the importance of local outreach in coordinating Palestinian social events and cultural activities:

“people may go online, but we are not active online, we do more ground community networking because there are alternatives in terms of political issues [like] Canadians Against Apartheid and the boycott [BDS] movement”.

Figure 6.21 <http://palestinehouse.com>



Palestinehouse.com Neighbours⁶⁸⁶

| Referers <i>(Nodes that cite http://palestinehouse.com)</i> | Mutually linked neighbours <i>(Nodes that cite and are cited by http://palestinehouse.com)</i> | Cited <i>(Nodes that are cited by http://palestinehouse.com)</i> |
|--|---|---|
| 13 → | ↑ 0 ↓ | 1 → |

Established in June 1992, Palestine House⁶⁸⁷ serves as the primary institution through which Palestinians in Toronto (and throughout Canada) organise community events.⁶⁸⁸ Promoting community cohesion through educational, cultural and social activities, the interviewee from Palestine House highlighted religious affiliation as a key operational challenge on the ground, commenting, “most of the community centres in Toronto are linked to a church or a mosque, you don’t see an ethnic community centre by itself usually.”⁶⁸⁹ He clarified that compared to other ethnic groups, members of the Palestinian diaspora (comprising Christians and Muslims) lack authority in local religious institutions. “We don’t have a Palestinian [or

⁶⁸⁶ Palestinehouse.com Corpus Node Exploration.

<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=86&map=68&node=167§ion=35>>

⁶⁸⁷ “Palestine House,” last accessed October 1, 2012.

< <http://palestinehouse.com/> >

⁶⁸⁸ “Palestine House.”

⁶⁸⁹ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

an] Arab Mosque in Toronto, all are donated by Pakistanis, Indians, the majority of the [Muslim] population here,” he explained.⁶⁹⁰ The absence of real leadership opportunities in local religious institutions has led local actors in countries of settlement to frame their community advocacy through ethno-nationalist attachments to homeland territories.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains woven into contemporary community narratives and continues to serve as the key source of Palestinian collective identity. Underlining community loyalties, the representative from Palestine House explained that community members “don’t feel like they belong to a religious community *per se*, but when there is a political demonstration, they’ll always come.”⁶⁹¹ Both the longevity of the unresolved conflict and the perpetual violence endured by populations in the occupied territories fuse diaspora identity politics to world affairs. Palestinian statehood remains a priority for populations living in Canada, who through their historical origins, take an active interest in reconciling homeland grievances. The representative for Palestine House noted that although the community centre focused largely on cultural and social activities, community engagements were never entirely separate from homeland politics. He explained that the legacy of forced displacement and the lack of justice in the form of statehood streamlined sentiments of belonging and attachment between members of the transnational community, commenting:

“Regardless of difference, being a Palestinian is the unifying factor, there are people from the left, right, Christians and Muslims...we don’t have this problem that people don’t feel connected to each other. On the contrary, Palestinians in Canada feel very much so connected to the homeland. Because of the political issues, the conflict, the kind of massacres, the refugees, each family has an experience with the occupation...that is the Palestinian identity.”⁶⁹²

Trumping religious and ideological differences, identity-based political formations build upon narratives of homeland struggle and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In recent times,

⁶⁹⁰ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

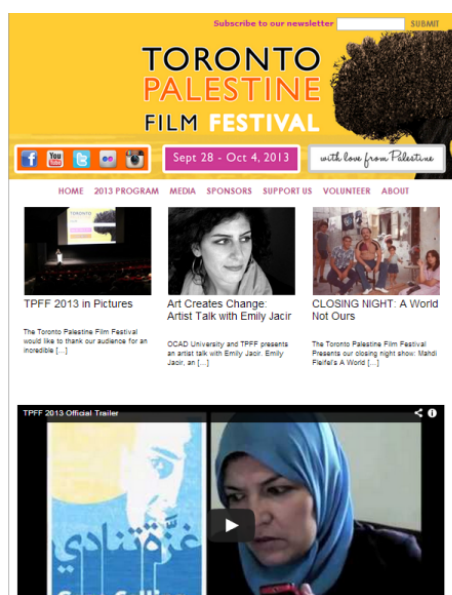
⁶⁹¹ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁶⁹² Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

efforts have been made to present a more balanced representation of the Palestinian diaspora community in Canada. Many of the activists involved in Palestine House, for example, also serve as volunteers for the annual Toronto Palestine Film Festival (TPFF).⁶⁹³ A volunteer for the TPFF explained that one of the main aims of the festival is to educate Canadian audiences of the Palestinian community, beyond politics:

“usually every time people think of Palestine, they think it’s going to be this ‘hard core’ political organisation. The whole purpose of the festival is to show the Palestinian narrative, which includes political conversations, but also concerns cultural arts, and things that happen in the Palestinian diaspora.”⁶⁹⁴

Figure 6.22 <http://tpff.ca>



The first TPFF⁶⁹⁵ was held in 2008, the year that marked the 60th anniversary of the *Nakba*.⁶⁹⁶ Filmmakers were invited to showcase Palestinian culture through cinematic works and calls for submission were widely advertised online. In addition to providing audiences with submission details, news media organisation and key corpus authority Electronic Intifada consistently publicised the various Palestinian film festivals held annually around the

⁶⁹³ Palestine House respondent also volunteers in the Toronto Palestine Film Festival (as Sponsor Relations)

⁶⁹⁴ Author interview with Toronto Palestine Film Festival member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁶⁹⁵ “About TPFF,” *Toronto Palestine Film Festival*, last accessed October 1, 2012. <<http://tpff.ca>>

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

world in its Arts, Music & Culture section.⁶⁹⁷ Online marketing has been integral to the TPDFF's continued growth and success. The same interviewee noted that compared to word-of-mouth advertising, web-based networking is "definitely more productive" and dynamic, adding, "the website is a portal to find information. Facebook is easier; people actually pay attention, people can have side conversations, use tags and it's far more interactive."⁶⁹⁸

I hope to illuminate and underscore the idea that the web has been most effective in facilitating communication with local and international audiences. This includes virtual discussions and film exchanges with volunteers from other Palestinian film festivals (Washington DC, Boston, London, Chicago, London, Oslo). One of the most popular events of the festival is the annual 'TPFF Party in the Pits Outdoor Screening', where audiences vote for their favourite Palestinian film through an online survey created by Survey Monkey.⁶⁹⁹ The winning film is screened free of charge at Christie Pits Park, a recreational area open to the public in downtown Toronto.⁷⁰⁰

Figure 6.23 TPFF Official Facebook Page



⁶⁹⁷ "Toronto Palestine Film Festival seeking entries - 20 February 2008," last accessed May 25, 2012. <<http://electronicintifada.net/content/toronto-palestine-film-festival-seeking-entries/809>>

⁶⁹⁸ Author interview with Toronto Palestine Film Festival member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

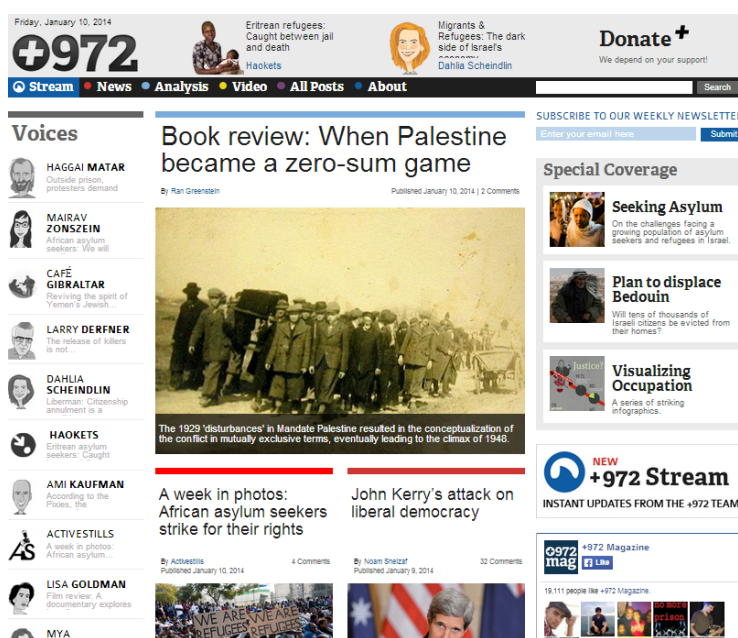
⁶⁹⁹ Web survey tool that functions on a cloud see: <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>>.

⁷⁰⁰ Toronto Palestinian Film Festival Facebook page, last accessed July 24, 2014. <<https://www.facebook.com/TorontoPalestineFilmFestival>>

6.6.2 Using the Online for On-the-Ground Politics

Shifting focus from engagements in countries of settlement to Israeli-Palestinian politics, online discussions of the homeland are informed by ground realities experienced first-hand. Online platforms provide activists with somewhere to share and disseminate news headlines specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fusing identity with politics, +972 Magazine is a blog-based online news resource that reports on life in Israel and the Palestinian territories. +972 refers to the international dialling code shared by Israel and the Palestinian territories. Established in 2010, the web magazine is jointly and horizontally owned by its contributing journalists, bloggers, photographers and editorial team, all of whom are based in Israel-Palestine.⁷⁰¹

Figure 6.24 <http://972mag.com/>



Although +972 advocates for human rights and opposes illegal Israeli occupation, bloggers are responsible for the opinions expressed on their individual channels (blogspaces). Offering a progressive, youth-based perspective to news reporting, a blogger (and founding member) of the web magazine explained, “we [+972] are a primary source based in Palestine and Israel, with our direct experiences of the conflict.”⁷⁰² The same interviewee argued that in the

⁷⁰¹ “+972 Magazine,” last accessed January 10, 2014. <<http://972mag.com/>>

⁷⁰² Author interview with +972 member on 29 March 2012, London, UK.

context of the conflict, the authenticity of on-the-ground experiences gave the blog-based web magazine legitimacy as a reputable news source:

“You can’t replace living the conflict. Even if you’re in the cosmopolitan bubble of Tel-Aviv, you still have more facets to your experience than you would if you were in the States reading everything that gets published.”⁷⁰³

Bloggers moderate their own channels and offer personalised news reporting that reflects their individual experiences. Focused primarily on the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, bloggers enjoy limited restrictions in terms of the content and opinions disseminated on their individual channels. While maintaining full rights over their weblog content, channels self-regulate through the individual blogger’s desire to expand readership. Disseminated content is only deemed relevant and ‘newsworthy’ through recognition (hyperlink aggregates) from audiences which, through re-postings, influence the virtual reach of +972 voices. The same interviewee explained that because online networks and social media platforms are user-centred, audiences played a key role in legitimising posts, adding “I personally like this form of marketing for two reasons; its free and it’s very honest. If the stuff you do is good, people will share it.”⁷⁰⁴

Audiences are equally encouraged to share their opinions through the various comment sections found on the main website and secondary Facebook page. They can also contribute to the web magazine directly by submitting an Op-Ed piece for publication to the editorial team. Online platforms allow contributors to market new ideas, and offer new, fresh and alternative perspectives to a conflict well ingrained in contemporary Israeli-Palestinian identity politics. Informed by their on-the-ground experiences, +972 bloggers vie to fill the knowledge and information gaps left behind by mainstream media outlets. The interviewee from +972, noted that a key distinguishing feature and the reason why the web magazine has

⁷⁰³ Author interview with +972 member on 29 March 2012, London, UK.

⁷⁰⁴ Author interview with +972 member on 29 March 2012, London, UK.

gained such popularity online is due to its specialised focus on Israeli-Palestinian affairs beyond the headlines:

“we recognise and try to compensate the gaps in the coverage of Israel-Palestine. So various local scandals, political developments that won’t necessarily get national interest media, we follow closely. The big huge events like peace summits get saturated coverage...you can get it elsewhere.”⁷⁰⁵

Weaving on-the-ground experiences in with their online political analysis and news reporting, Palestinian activists conversely use international law and human rights-based discourse to appeal to wider external audiences. An employee of Badil (Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights), based in Palestine, explained that in promoting Palestinian political rights, the organisation used “a clear methodology, not according to any agenda, but to international law.”⁷⁰⁶ Badil is a community-led organisation first established in January 1998 by a coalition of Palestinian activists located in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. According to the interviewee, the web has revolutionised the communicative capabilities between dispersed Palestinians across the globe, and has been of great benefit to the organisation. He noted that the web had become essential to daily operations, including collecting data and communicating refugee realities:

“technology has made it easier...hugely...the main obstacles we face are physical, being in contact with refugees everywhere. We work hugely online, interviews, surveys, we send them by email...just an example of how these techniques make our work much easier.”⁷⁰⁷

To advocate for the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the organisation uses its web presence to educate audiences on Palestinian political grievances. The centrality of the refugee issue in Palestinian diaspora politics offers an explanation as to

⁷⁰⁵ Author interview with +972 member on 29 March 2012, London, UK.

⁷⁰⁶ Author interview with Badil member on 15 June 2012, Palestine (via Skype).

⁷⁰⁷ Author interview with Badil member on 15 June 2012, Palestine (via Skype).

why Badil maintains such an influential presence online. Audiences can access a plethora of resources through the website, including historical overviews, information on the Nakba, journal publications, books and photos. Badil also promotes engagement at local level, and encourages the Palestinian community to mobilise around issues in the homeland by providing resources for refugee lawyers, legal advocacy networks, and civil society refugee campaigns.

Online networks facilitate collaboration between like-minded actors and audiences, and have diversified the events, activities and functional operations of the organisation. The Al-Awda Awards were established as a way for Badil to promote Palestinian identity and culture between dispersed populations.⁷⁰⁸ Held annually since 2007, the awards honour writers, researchers and artists for their contributions to the Palestinian community. Winners are selected for the following categories: children's story, Nakba-Commemoration Poster, research essay, written journalism, photography (for youth under 18), and are widely publicised online.

Empowering community-led mobilisation processes; the 'Civil Society Activists Group' was created in 2012, for civil society and youth populations seeking "to better their capacities" as Palestinian activists.⁷⁰⁹ In addition to attending discussion groups, participants receive specialised training on public relations strategy, writing techniques, international law and online networking. Looking to the future, the interviewee explained the project as an "investment for Badil as an organisation" adding, "these people are active, they come back with experience when needed."⁷¹⁰ The organisation's rights-based approach has equally provided a channel for collaboration. "We deal with everyone on an equal basis", explained the interviewee, "the main criteria is if they believe in Palestinian rights or not."⁷¹¹ Social media platforms have been most effective in linking Badil (a community led initiative) to a wider network of 'cause-based' transnational activists.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁸ "BADIL – Annual Al-Awda Award," *BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights*, last accessed November 10, 2014. <<http://badil.org/annual-al-awda-award/item/266-about-the-award>>

⁷⁰⁹ Author interview with Badil member on 15 June 2012, Palestine (via Skype).

⁷¹⁰ Author interview with Badil member on 15 June 2012, Palestine (via Skype).

⁷¹¹ Author interview with Badil member on 15 June 2012, Palestine (via Skype).

⁷¹² Hashtags (#) pin international law to the BDS online network. BADIL's Facebook Page, last accessed July 11, 2014. <<https://www.facebook.com/BADILCenter>>

Figure 6.25 Badil Facebook Post - BDS



Jewish led Advocacy: Promoting Peace in Solidarity with the Palestinian Cause

Peace-based networks maintain a notable presence throughout Palestinian virtual space, and require us to take a closer look at the muddled conceptual boundaries of the Palestinian community online. Corpus results indicate that many actors, including Jewish-led peace organisations, frame their support for the Palestinian cause through principles of international law and the master frame of human rights. Noting an increase in Jewish led advocacy, a member of one such organisation explained, “more and more you see a percentage of people who identify social justice as the source of their Jewish identity...that’s a growing group.”⁷¹³

Jewish organisations such as the UK based Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJfP), link their advocacy to human rights and political freedoms, which are argued essential to lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. An interviewee from the organisation explained that they were “more about the political identity” adding, “we are criticising the occupation because it’s the occupation that’s oppressive to Palestinians.”⁷¹⁴ Tasked with maintaining the JfJfP website, the interviewee considered herself “a facilitator of debate, discussion, and education” on all topics related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷¹⁵ She noted that because JfJfP published minimal original content, much of her daily advocacy took place online, and included collecting and reposting relevant news updates to the website.

⁷¹³ Author interview with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP) member on 15 May 2012, New York (via Skype)

⁷¹⁴ Author interview with JfJfP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

⁷¹⁵ Author interview with JfJfP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

Although online platforms facilitate collaboration between activists supporting Palestinian rights, these asynchronous networks can equally cause conflict over information and followers internally between actors. Internet web 2.0 technologies are diversifying and strengthening Palestinian solidarity networks. However, as the interviewee from JfJfP explained, actors vying to increase their following and authority online are sometimes protective over the flow of their website content. On these internal power struggles:

“Electronic Intifada get quite irritated, they don’t want people to post their stuff...they wrote me with that. They want people to read EI itself...I wrote back and said “well actually the people reading on our website wouldn’t know about it any other way”, because we have our own followers.”⁷¹⁶

The prominence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in international politics has inextricably woven Palestinian led online advocacy to Jewish peace organisations, a trend that cannot be fully explained by traditional approaches to diaspora politics or state-centric thinking. ‘Cause-based’ activists mobilise around Palestinian narratives of struggle and the injustices of Israeli occupation. Jewish-led peace organisations, while advocating for equal human rights and political freedoms, are sometimes met with hostility from members of the Palestinian community. The interviewee from JfJfP noted that due to ethno-religious symbolic connections with Israel, the organisation at times “got some difficulty from Palestinians themselves”, and therefore collaborated with larger advocacy Palestinian solidarity networks by sharing campaigns and joining in on demonstrations.⁷¹⁷

According to the representative from Palestine House, a fear remains amongst community actors that the ever-growing transnational network of activists supporting the Palestinian cause may in actuality come to threaten the authority and authenticity of communal grievances:

⁷¹⁶ Author interview with JfJfP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

⁷¹⁷ Author interview with JfJfP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

“organisational leadership should involve a Palestinian, it will give the political line more legitimacy. It’s not in the interest of the Palestinian people that their activities be hijacked or directed by people other than Palestinians.”⁷¹⁸

Jewish peace organisations support Palestinian-led advocacy by networking into prominent campaigns like the BDS movement. The web has also served as an open platform to support progressive Jews who wish to connect and vocalise their discontent with Israeli foreign policy. A key example of this is the JfJfP’s virtual signatory campaign, which allows British Jews to publicly express their opposition to “Israeli policies that undermine the livelihoods, human, civil and political rights of the Palestinian people.”⁷¹⁹ Signatories are emailed a weekly summary of website postings, and are informed of Palestinian solidarity protests and demonstrations set to take place in the UK. The interviewee from JfJfP explained that one of the organisation’s main aims was to raise public awareness of the growing number of British Jews who support a peaceful resolution to the conflict, “it’s important for Palestinians to know there are Jewish people supporting them in Britain. It’s important for Jews too...and even governments and news agencies.”⁷²⁰

A founding member of Not in Our Name (NION): Jewish Voices Opposing Zionism, based in Toronto, clarified that “Palestinians still run the movement”, and for progressive Jews like herself, occupation was “a human rights issue and a social justice cause.”⁷²¹ Many activists involved in NION are also affiliated with Independent Jewish Voices (Canada), a national human rights organisation promoting a peaceful and politically sound resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the interviewee from NION, “those who are active work in different organisations” and “strongly support the boycott.”⁷²² Framing their advocacy through principles of human rights and international law, Jewish peace activists are often accused by supporters of Israel of betraying their Jewish identity. One such activist confided, “I sometimes think what I’m doing does give fuel to anti-Semites... I’m anxious about it, but this is a form of political expression by Jewish people who do not wish to

⁷¹⁸ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷¹⁹ “Jfjfp Signatory Campaign,” *Jews for Justice for Palestinians*, last accessed June 11, 2014.
<http://jfjfp.com/?page_id=9>

⁷²⁰ Author interview with JFJFP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

⁷²¹ Author interview with Not In Our Name (NION) member on 20 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷²² Author interview with Not In Our Name (NION) member on 20 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

support injustices”, adding that peace organisations were “a place to go if you felt excluded from the dominant Jewish-Israeli discourse.”⁷²³

These organisations provide an outlet for progressive Jews to clarify and strengthen the political aspects of their identities in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Inspired by ideals of equality, social justice and human rights, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)⁷²⁴ is one of the more prominent Jewish-led organisations to publicly express solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Established in 1996 in the Bay Area, JVP has chapters in over 20 cities across the US including Albuquerque, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minnesota, North Carolina, New York City, Philadelphia, Seattle and Washington DC.⁷²⁵ The organisation has often garnered significant media attention through its Advisory Board, which includes Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Tony Kushner and over 30 rabbis.⁷²⁶

Figure 6.26 <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>



Critical of the US government’s role in feeding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a member of JVP explained, “we are Jewish-led, but we welcome non-Jewish partners”, acknowledging

⁷²³ Author interview with JFJFP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

⁷²⁴ “Jewish Voice for Peace,” last accessed October 1, 2012.

⁷²⁵ <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>

⁷²⁶ “JVP Local Actors - Organize Locally,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 9, 2014.

<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/chapters>

⁷²⁶ “JVP Advisory Board,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 9, 2014.

<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/content/advisory-board>

that increasingly “there is a larger constituency of Americans who don’t see their values reflected in US policy.”⁷²⁷ JVP frames its opposition to Israeli occupation through principles of human rights, and often coordinates their protests and demonstrations alongside Palestinian solidarity networks, which explains why the organisation maintains a significant presence across the Palestinian corpus.

Supporters distinguish themselves as mobilised Jewish voices, and while acknowledging the authority of Palestinian activists, assume a sense of ownership over their advocacy. Promoting collaborative engagements between transnational activist networks, the interviewee from JVP clarified, “we want to play our important role, but not speak for someone else; diverse partnerships are important for that.”⁷²⁸ JVP empowers its supporters with an ‘Activist Toolkit’, which provides a variety of resources for online and offline forms mobilisation.⁷²⁹ Toolkit content includes Gaza fact sheets, downloadable posters, information on Jewish rituals and HOPE clothing merchandise.⁷³⁰



Figure 6.27 Jewish Voice for Peace.org Online Store

Web 2.0 online platforms help JVP to coordinate boycott-divestment campaigns between local chapters. My respondent explained that while opposed to Israeli occupation of

⁷²⁷ Author interview with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP) member on 15 May 2012, New York (via Skype)

⁷²⁸ Author interview with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP) member on 15 May 2012, New York (via Skype)

⁷²⁹ “JVP Took Kit,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 9, 2014.

<<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/toolkit>>

⁷³⁰ “JVP Online Store,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 9, 2014.

<<http://www.cafepress.com/jewishvoice>>

Palestinian land, JVP did not support the sanctioning of all Israeli products. Rather, the organisation makes concerted efforts to simplify ‘acting out’ the boycott by targeting specific companies that benefit from the occupation. The interviewee noted that due to the loose nature of Palestinian solidarity networks, the effectiveness of the BDS movement relied on the steering abilities of key actors, “how people can enact it [the boycott], isn’t always clear...I think we’ve done a good job figuring out as an organisation what it means to put things into practice.”⁷³¹

A key example of this is the ‘Hewlett-Packard: Hampering Peace’ campaign which calls for a boycott and divestment of all HP products. JVP argues that by producing the biometric ID cards used at military checkpoints and providing information technology and computer hardware to the Israeli military and navy, HP profits from the occupation. Supporters are encouraged to join protests, demonstrations and ‘die-in’ performances held nationally during the fall back-to-school shopping season. They are also invited to “pledge, share and learn”, and maintain a virtual signatory campaign online.⁷³² In addition to informative resource links, supporters are encouraged to download and share graphics on their personal social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to extend the ‘reach’ of the campaign.

Figure 6.28 Social Network Shareable Graphics



Hewlett-Packard: Harming Peace⁷³³

⁷³¹ Author interview with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP) member on 15 May 2012, New York (via Skype)

⁷³² “JVP Virtual Signatory Campaign,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 16, 2014. <<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/hewlett-packard-harming-peace>>

⁷³³ “JVP Hewlett-Packard: Harming Peace,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 5, 2014. <<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/hewlett-packard-harming-peace>>

Like many Palestinian solidarity groups, JVP also campaigns for the boycott of SodaStream, a home carbonation device that maintains its central manufacturing plant in a West Bank settlement.⁷³⁴ Supporters are encouraged to take part in the ‘SodaStream - Burst the Bubble’ campaign by contacting their local chapter online. Local chapters collaborate with activists from external organisations, organising ‘National Days of Action against SodaStream’ during peak sales periods and holiday shopping seasons (Thanksgiving, Christmas). One such action occurred on December 8, 2013, when JVP-Boston and the American Friends Service Committee⁷³⁵ (a Quaker organisation), staged a flash mob in a Target department store, demanding a de-shelving of all SodaStream products. Online audiences can view these demonstrations on JVP’s YouTube channel, which also includes various protest footage, public declarations and short informational videos.⁷³⁶ One of the more mainstream SodaStream headlines occurred in January 2014 when Hollywood actress Scarlett Johansson quit her role as a global ambassador for Oxfam after being widely criticised for being the new spokesperson of SodaStream.⁷³⁷

Targeted boycott campaigns highlight the utility of the web tools in mobilising collective action on the ground. Jewish peace organisations formalise their opposition to Israeli occupation by supporting heavily networked Palestinian led initiatives like the BDS movement. Virtual solidarity networks pin occupation to boycott, and facilitate cross-collaboration between diverse sets of human rights activists. Organisations like JVP express their commitment to lasting peace by organising campaigns, protests and demonstrations at local levels. As noted by the same JVP member, “even as we grow, we want to preserve that face-to-face connection...complemented by a huge online community...we try and connect and have a unity between the two.”⁷³⁸

Diverse partnerships have increased JVP’s overall influence within Palestinian solidarity networks and have provided a channel for the organisation to spearhead complementary BDS initiatives. The ‘Go & Learn: BDS Education’ initiative organised by

⁷³⁴ “JVP SodaStream - Burst the Bubble,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed June 5, 2014. <<https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/sodastream-burst-the-bubble>>

⁷³⁵ “About AFSC,” *American Friends Service Committee*, last accessed June 5, 2014. <<http://afsc.org/about>>

⁷³⁶ “JVP - YouTube Uploads,” *YouTube.com*, last accessed June 5, 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/user/JVP18/videos>>

⁷³⁷ “Scarlett Johansson quits Oxfam role over SodaStream role,” *BBC.co.uk*, last modified January 30, 2014, last accessed August 1, 2014. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-25958176>>

⁷³⁸ Author interview with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP) member on 15 May 2012, New York (via Skype)

‘Young, Jewish, and Proud’ (the youth wing of the organisation), encourages youth to develop their own opinions on the boycott.⁷³⁹ Organisers facilitate discussion between attendees, which is complemented with historical information and faith-based texts. The event is free and open to all, including those who do not support BDS and has been held in many cities across the US, including the Bay Area, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Seattle.

One of the more empowering collaborative initiatives in which JVP is involved in, is the ‘BDS Summer Institute’ (August 2014 in Northern California).⁷⁴⁰ The five-day student leadership workshop offers intensive training on how to implement and improve boycott campaigns on university/college campuses. Attendees are coached on grassroots outreach and online social media strategies, and are also provided with an extensive historical overview of the BDS movement. While co-organised by JVP and the American Friends Service Committee, Palestine Solidarity Legal Support and BDS movement leaders are also heavily involved in the training session.

6.6.3 Transnational Political Mobilisation and Virtual Campaign Networks: BDS

Collaborative initiatives like the ‘BDS Summer Institute’ highlights the growing investment in non-violent popular resistance campaigns that simultaneously advocate for Palestinian rights and challenge policies that have allowed Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land to continue for so long. The BDS movement is a prime example of transnational political mobilisation around issues in the Palestinian occupied territories, and maintains a staunch virtual outreach strategy. Linking civil society to human rights activists, peace based organisations, and Palestinian solidarity groups, digital technologies provide additional networks for BDS supporters to unite, mobilise and ‘act out’ their discontent for Israeli policies in the occupied territories.

⁷³⁹ “Young, Jewish, and Proud - Go & Learn,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last accessed July 25, 2014. <<http://www.youngjewishproud.org/go-learn-join-young-jews-for-community-bds-education/>>

⁷⁴⁰ “BDS Summer Institute: A 5 Day Student Leadership Training (SLT),” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, last modified March 19, 2014, last accessed July 25, 2014. <<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/blog/apply-now-for-the-2014-bds-student-leadership-training>>

Figure 6.29 <http://bdsmovement.net/>



The BDS movement was established in July 2005 by a coalition of 170 Palestinian organisations.⁷⁴¹ The movement advocates for Palestinian rights through coordinated economic, political and cultural pressure against Israel.⁷⁴² Inspired by the international campaign against apartheid in South Africa, the movement employs a non-violent rights-based approach throughout its campaign strategies.⁷⁴³ Online platforms are used to network and steer mobilisation on the ground and have proved most effective in coordinating transnational campaigns like the 2012 BDS Global Day of Action. Organised in commemoration of Palestinian Land Day (March 30), BDS leaders called on supporters to take part in a day of non-violent resistance and collective action against Israeli occupation. Activists from across 23 countries engaged in over 50 actions simultaneously, which were pinned on an interactive world map on the official BDS website.⁷⁴⁴ Supporters were also invited to follow the day of action live on Twitter through the hashtag #BDSIsrael, which if re-tweeted, became a (connective) action in itself. The hashtag allowed activists to engage in

⁷⁴¹ "BDS Movement," last accessed October 1, 2012.

<<http://bdsmovement.net/>>

⁷⁴² "Palestinian BDS National Committee," *BDS Movement*, last accessed June 20, 2014.

<<http://www.bdsmovement.net/BNC>>

⁷⁴³ "Introducing the BDS Movement," *BDS Movement*, last accessed June 20, 2014.

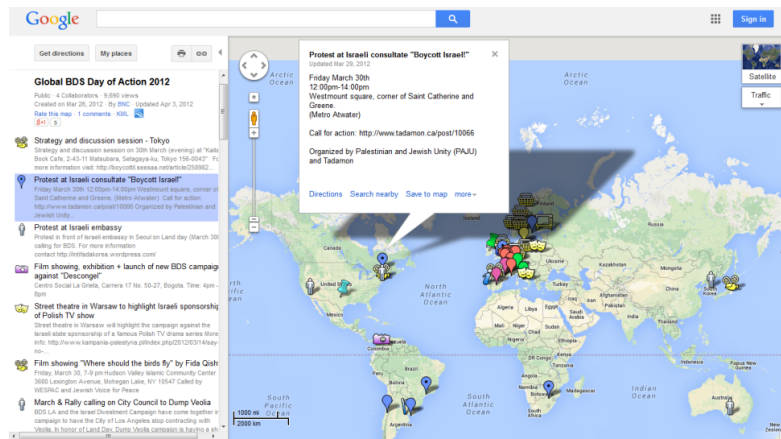
<<http://www.bdsmovement.net/bdsintro>>

⁷⁴⁴ "BDS Global Day of Action," *BDS Movement*, last modified March 30, 2012, last accessed June 20, 2014.

<<http://www.bdsmovement.net/2012/doa-2012-8780>>

virtual protest through Twitter, and #BDSIsrael was noted to have trended worldwide for over an hour during this time.⁷⁴⁵

Figure 6.30 BDS Global Day of Action 2012



The #BDS hashtag has since emerged as a popular symbol of Palestinian solidarity online. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter rely on user-generated content and therefore provide ample connective opportunities for BDS supporters to expand the reach of the movement. Supporters use their personal social networks to share YouTube videos of protests, online news updates, scholarly debates and increasingly raw images from the occupied territories. Hashtags can be added to these posts, allowing online users to assemble and view all the content archived under #BDS with just one click.

The horizontal nature of these digital networks removes the structural hierarchies that often deter citizen engagement. BDS supporters maintain a sense of ownership over their online advocacy and can contribute (via posts and shares) to the campaign at their discretion. The empowering capabilities of the web have not only served to strengthen the BDS network but have diversified the movement's supporters. Youth populations are particularly active in the BDS campaign, with various student unions publicly endorsing it (including the Graduate Students Association at Carleton University in March 2012, and the University of Toronto Graduate Students Association in December 2012).⁷⁴⁶ The campaign maintains a loose transnational network of activists, with online platforms serving to both (re)connect

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ "University of Toronto Scarborough Students' Union (SCSU) endorses BDS!" *BDS Movement*, last modified April 24, 2013, last accessed June 20, 2014. <<http://www.bdsmovement.net/2013/toronto-scarborough-10937>>

supporters and raise greater awareness of the injustices of Israeli occupation. Campaign victories are widely celebrated online and serve as positive reinforcement for supporters of the grassroots movement.⁷⁴⁷

Figure 6.31 BDS Interactive Victory Timeline



One of the first major victories of the global campaign occurred in March 2011, when the University of Johannesburg decided to cut ties and end its 25 year long relationship with Ben-Gurion University. This decision was supported by a petition signed by 400 South African academics and was also backed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.⁷⁴⁸ Academic boycotts of Israel have sparked significant controversy and have been widely discussed in the mainstream media. The most notable victory to date occurred in May 2013 when world-renowned physicist and cosmologist Professor Stephen Hawking pulled out of the Israeli Presidential Conference hosted by President Shimon Peres in support of the academic boycott.⁷⁴⁹ The decision became headline news and drew significant attention from mainstream media outlets such as the Guardian, BBC, and the New York Times.⁷⁵⁰ In a

⁷⁴⁷ "BDS Timeline," *BDS Movement*, last accessed June 16, 2014.

<http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/28282/BDS-Movement#vars!date=2008-11-24_09:54:50!>

⁷⁴⁸ "South African University severs ties with Israel," *Telegraph.co.uk*, last modified March 24, 2011, last accessed June 16, 2014.

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/8404451/South-African-university-severs-ties-with-Israel.html>>

⁷⁴⁹ "Five Reasons why Hawking is Right to Boycott Israel," *BDS Movement*, last modified May 9, 2013, last accessed June 16, 2014. <<http://www.bdsmovement.net/2013/hawking-boycott-israel-10944>>

⁷⁵⁰ "Stephen Hawking joins Academic Boycott of Israel," *Theguardian.com*, last modified May 8, 2013, last accessed August 2, 2014.

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/08/stephen-hawking-israel-academic-boycott>>

follow up story, the Guardian revealed that after only five days, their initial report on Hawking's decision to boycott the conference had been shared on Facebook over 100,000 times and had since gone viral.⁷⁵¹

Economic and political pressures from financial institutions have also made their way into Palestinian identity politics. The International Business Times, a popular online news publication, was one of the first mainstream media outlets to report the blacklisting of the Israeli Bank Hapoalim by Denmark's largest bank, Danske Bank, in February 2014.⁷⁵² According to the report, both Danske Bank and Sweden's Nordea Bank, (the largest bank in Scandinavia) had decided to boycott Bank Hapoalim due to its financing of illegal settlement construction in the occupied territories of the West Bank.⁷⁵³ Coverage from news media outlets enhances the public visibility of the BDS movement and raises awareness of Palestinian rights and Israeli occupation. Audiences may not be politically active, however through such 'newsworthy' headline stories, may become interested in learning more about the boycott and the people suffering from occupation. The same holds true for popular artists who publicly state their opposition to the occupation, or opt out of scheduled performances in Israel in response to BDS campaign pressure. Musicians like Bono, Snoop Dogg, Elvis Costello, Carlos Santana, the Pixies, Cat Power, and Zakir Hussain⁷⁵⁴ may not hold any political power *per se*, but maintain a significant following and influence in popular culture. Musicians therefore are regarded as a key source of social capital for the BDS movement, and provide an additional cultural repertoire to campaign network strategy.

"Stephen Hawking boycotts major Israel conference," *BBC.co.uk*, last modified May 8, 2013, last accessed August 2, 2014. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22446054>>

"Stephen Hawking Joins Boycott Against Israel," *NYTimes.com*, last modified May 8, 2013, last accessed August 2, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/09/world/middleeast/stephen-hawking-joins-boycott-against-israel.html?_r=0>

⁷⁵¹ "Stephen Hawking's boycott hits Israel where it hurts: science," *Theguardian.com*, last modified May 13, 2013, last accessed August 2, 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2013/may/13/stephen-hawking-boycott-israel-science>>

⁷⁵² "Israel Boycott Pressure Mounts as Denmark's Danske Bank Blacklists Israel Hapoalim," *IBTimes.co.uk*, last modified February 2, 2013, last accessed August 2, 2014. <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/israel-boycott-pressure-mounts-denmarks-danske-bank-blacklists-israel-hapoalim-1434898>>

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ "BDS Victories," *BDS Movement*, last accessed August 2, 2014. <<http://www.bdsmovement.net/victories>>

6.6.4 Empowerment, Social Media and Smartphones: the 2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict

The above analysis underscores the growing difficulties involved in disentangling transnational activist networks from online representations of the Palestinian collective identity. Secondary virtual technology (smartphones) and user-generated social media networks have the ability to transform the ways in which activists mobilise during heightened periods of conflict. The empowering capabilities of virtual networks can be witnessed in the latest Israel-Gaza conflict, which began on July 8 2014. After a period of escalated tension with Hamas, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) launched ‘Operation Protective Edge’, a siege that since its initial days has been widely reported on by mainstream news outlets (BBC, CNN, CBC) and increasingly popular social news sites (BuzzFeed, Mashable, Huffington Post).

Demanding an end to the conflict, Palestinian solidarity groups and activist networks used the web to coordinate protests against the offensive. Scenes of violence against innocent civilians (particularly children) were widely circulated online, sparking a series of protests in cities across the globe, including Paris, Seoul, London, Frankfurt, Tehran, Wellington, Buenos Aires, and Durban.⁷⁵⁵ An activist who took part in the July 26 2014 London protest noted that she had been invited to attend the event through Facebook. She explained that she followed many human rights organisations online, and had an interest in social justice both personally and professionally. According to the interviewee, online images from Gaza were key to raising international awareness of the realities of the occupied territories, “when children are the victims, people can no longer look away.”⁷⁵⁶

Smartphone applications and social media platforms add another user-generated resource to news reporting, and have played an important role in shaping how conflict is perceived globally. Virtual technologies provide a voice for innocent civilians, liquefying ground-level politics and reportage by showing individuals reacting to the violence happening in Gaza through their handheld devices, have challenged hierarchies of information like never before. Palestinian solidarity groups use online platforms to share raw data (non-digitised graphic videos and images) from resource-poor individuals on the

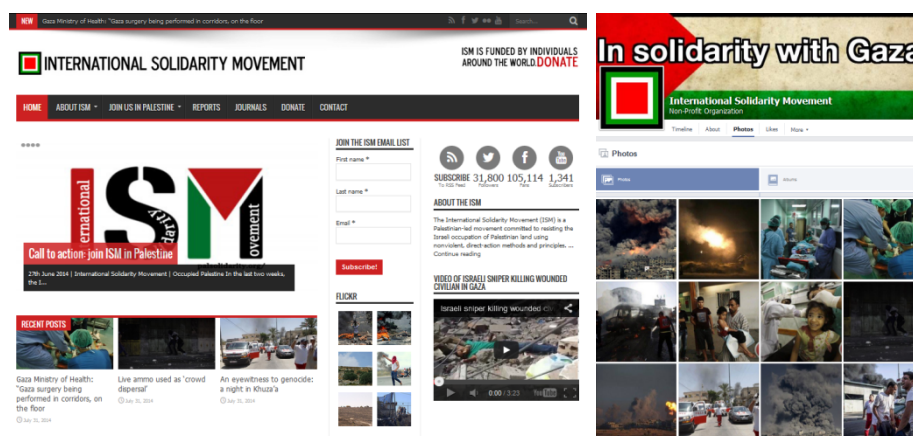
⁷⁵⁵ “Gaza violence sparks global protests - in pictures,” *Theguardian.com*, last modified July 26, 2014, last accessed August 2, 2014.

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2014/jul/26/gaza-violence-sparks-global-protests-in-pictures>>

⁷⁵⁶ Interview - Protestor at London Palestinian Solidarity - July 26, 2014 (London).

ground, in real-time. Both the unfiltered nature and immediacy of these posts challenge conventional news media outlets that often only relay information after it has been authenticated and edited.

Figure 6.32 International Solidarity Movement
(palsolidarity.org)⁷⁵⁷



Online solidarity groups also steer audiences to smartphone apps that allow individuals (as consumers) to engage in active protest and personalised politics, with greater ease. This is evidence by the appropriation of the Buycott⁷⁵⁸ app, a free download released in May 2013 by Los Angeles based freelance programmer Ivan Pardo. Buycott allows consumers to scan the barcode on any product and trace its ownership to its top corporate companies and has been profiled by the CBC, Huffington Post and Forbes Magazine.⁷⁵⁹ Through user-generated

⁷⁵⁷ International Solidarity Movement Palestine Facebook page, last accessed August 1, 2014.

<https://www.facebook.com/ismpalestine/photos_stream>

⁷⁵⁸ "Buycott – Barcode Scanner & Bar Code Reader – Vote with your Wallet," *Itunes.apple.com*, last accessed August 21, 2014. <<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/buycott-barcode-scanner-grocery/id585933440?mt=8https://www.facebook.com/FreePalestineWorld?fref=nf>>

⁷⁵⁹ "New App Buycott Lets Users Protest Koch Brothers, Monsanto and More," *Huffingtonpost.com*, last accessed August 6, 2014.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/15/buycott-app_n_3279214.html>

"New App Lets You Boycott Koch Brothers, Monsanto And More By Scanning Your Shopping Cart," *Forbes.com*, last modified May 14, 2014, last accessed August 6, 2014.

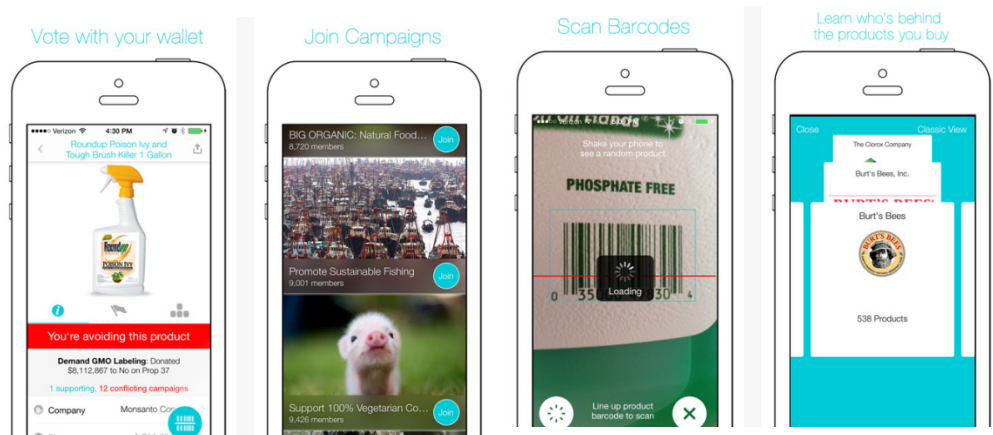
<<http://www.forbes.com/sites/clareoconnor/2013/05/14/new-app-lets-you-boycott-koch-brothers-monsanto-and-more-by-scanning-your-shopping-cart/>>

"How to Use a Barcode for a Boycott," *CBC.ca*, last accessed May 21, 2014.

<<http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2013/05/21/how-to-use-a-barcode-for-a-boycott/>>

campaigns, individuals can use the app to ‘protest through their pocket’ and support causes through their consumption choices.

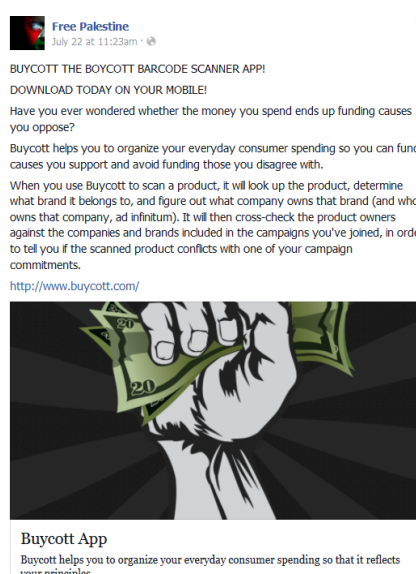
Figure 6.33 Buycott smartphone app interface



Promoting the boycott of Israeli products, moderators of the ‘Free Palestine’ community page directed its followers to the Buycott app on July 22, 2014. ‘Free Palestine’ was established in January 2014 and has over 46,000 likes on Facebook. Engagement statistics (provided through Facebook) indicate that the most active followers on the community page are those based in London and those between the ages of 18 and 24.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁶⁰ Free Palestine’s Facebook page, last accessed July 1, 2014.
<<https://www.facebook.com/FreePalestineWorld?fref=nf>>

Figure 6.34 Free Palestine - Facebook – Buycott App



Buycott has been most beneficial to BDS supporters, who often lack the practical tools to actively protest against Israeli occupation.⁷⁶¹ Highlighting the popularity of the app amongst activists, trending campaigns are noted to coincide with the timeline of the conflict. Statistics indicate that compared to any other registered campaign, ‘Long live Palestine boycott Israel’ (initiated by ‘lukehtfc’) maintains the greatest number of followers (over 164,000 members). The trending ‘Avoid Israeli Settlement Products’ campaign, while focused on Palestinian rights, is tailored to products made in illegal settlements.⁷⁶² The campaign has over 84,000 members, and provides a list of products to avoid, including SodaStream.⁷⁶³ The app facilitates targeted campaigns, allowing peace organisations like JVP to strategically boycott companies such as Hewlett Packard which, they argue, benefit from Israeli occupation. All Buycott campaigns are interactive, and aside from a detailed product overview, include a comment section, allowing users to interact with one another in real-time.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶¹ Free Palestine’s Facebook page, last accessed July 1, 2014.

<<https://www.facebook.com/FreePalestineWorld/posts/5984702069367193>>

⁷⁶² “Avoid Israeli Settlement Products,” *Buycott.com*, last accessed August 21, 2014.

<<http://www.buycott.com/campaign/500/avoid-israeli-settlement-products>>

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ “Buycott App Long Live Palestine boycott Israel,” *Buycott.com*, last accessed August 21, 2014.

<<http://www.buycott.com/campaign/782/long-live-palestine-boycott-israel>>

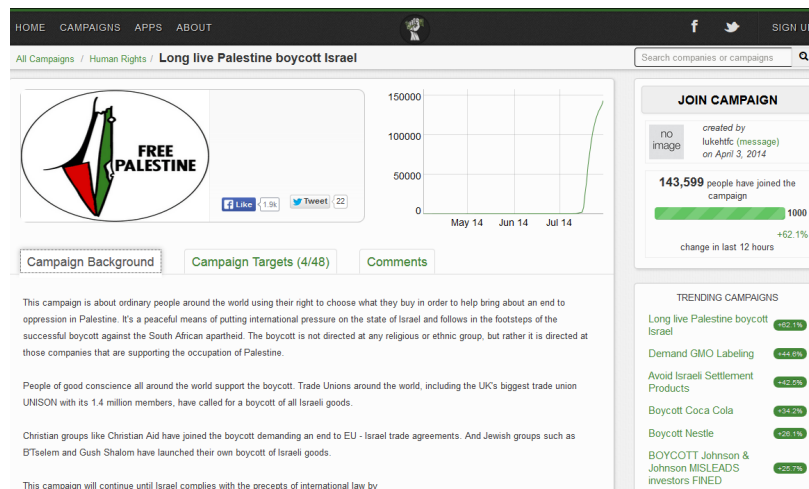


Figure 6.35 Buycott App Long Live Palestine

The intensity of real-time communication between networked transnational activists and Palestinians in Gaza was a key distinguishing feature of the latest 2014 conflict. Hashtagged virtual engagements cut and shrink cyberspace, allowing activists to network, assemble and aggregate issue-specific content with greater immediacy. Prominent hashtags #BDS, #GazaUnderAttack and #FreeGaza have emerged as a form of virtual protest throughout the cyber domain and social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Posts are characteristically short, under 140 characters for Twitter, and often rely on images to convey meaning. A Tagboard exploration⁷⁶⁵ of #BDS⁷⁶⁶ and #GazaUnderAttack⁷⁶⁷ reveals the global scale of Palestinian solidarity networks, with many posts presented in languages other than English (French, Spanish, and Japanese). Hashtags that attach images from Gaza such as child victims and on the ground protests fuse the international community to the conflict.

⁷⁶⁵ Tagboard uses hashtags to search for and collect public social media within seconds of being posted to networks: <https://tagboard.com/>

⁷⁶⁶ #BDS Hashtag, Tagboard, last searched July 7, 2014.

<<https://tagboard.com/BDS>>

⁷⁶⁷ #GazaUnderAttack Hashtag, Tagboard, last searched July 7, 2014.

<<https://tagboard.com/GazaUnderAttack>>

Figure 6.36 Tagboard #BDS Hashtag

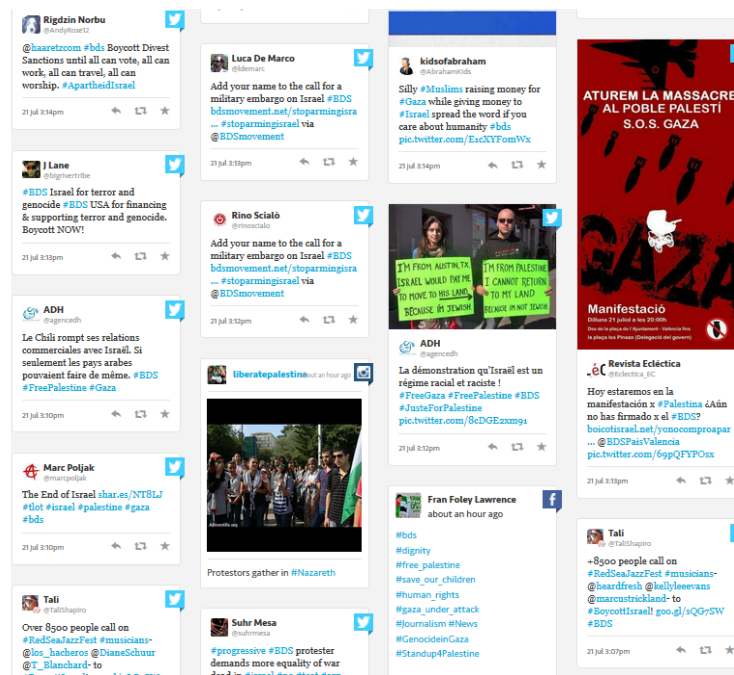
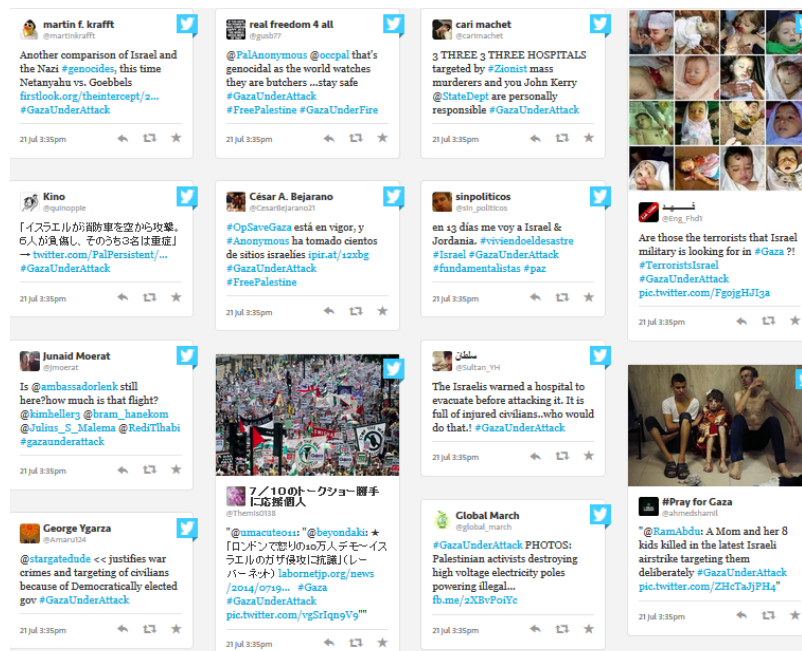


Figure 6.37 Tagboard #GazaUnderAttack Hashtag



The 'Free Palestine' community page has also emerged a platform for virtual protest.⁷⁶⁸ This form of personalised politics is based on pictures of followers holding their passport in solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Followers can 'like', share and reply to pictures, which keeps posts from becoming inactive.

Figure 6.38 Passport Solidarity Protest



Online platforms internationalised the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. Questions on the future of Palestine and the potential for self-determination have reignited since that time, with a wider audience taking an interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Solidarity groups have played an integral role in promoting Palestinian rights and raising awareness of the conditions in the occupied territories online. Virtual networks provide a loose structure for community members and cause-based activists to unite and mobilise, who in their appeals for justice demand greater accountability from the international community.

6.7 Conclusion

The prominence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in global politics has led to an increased internationalisation of the Palestinian cause. The longevity of the conflict has also served to break down barriers of inclusion that would otherwise deter non-community members from engaging in Palestinian advocacy. Palestinian virtual space is complex, and is largely

⁷⁶⁸ Free Palestine's Facebook page, last accessed July 1, 2014.
<<https://www.facebook.com/FreePalestineWorld/timeline> 2-8>

maintained by a loose network of transnational activities that support Palestinian political rights. The flexibility of user-centred online platforms makes it increasingly difficult to decipher Palestinian diaspora politics from the social movements and transnational activist networks that mobilise in the name of resource-poor individuals caught in the conflict. However, based on systematic analysis, it is clear that Palestinian virtual space does not represent the diaspora *per se*, focusing instead on the territorial claims that have come to define Palestinian collective identity (including refugees).

The importance of territorial claims in shaping the contemporary Palestinian identity has effectively fused community grievances to world affairs. The growing number of non-Palestinian activists involved in the cause may eventually come to threaten the authority and authenticity of homeland grievances, a key concern for Palestinian community actors. Responding to the saturation of politics online, Palestinian activists direct their efforts to neglected aspects of the Palestinian identity, such as cultural heritage or life in countries of settlement. Local cultural and social events are organised by actors to foster ethnic primordial loyalties between community members beyond the scope of politics, and therefore occupy minimal webspace.

In supporting my argument, the research findings presented in this chapter indicate that online mobilisation activities cater to a transnational audience, focus on raising awareness of the Palestinian people and liquefying the desperate conditions in the occupied territories. Updates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the on-the-ground politics in the homeland fuel activism, underlining the importance of news based website flows in shaping virtual network activities. As a mobilising structure, virtual space serves as an instrument for activists to organise and coordinate calls to action with greater efficiency. Moving beyond the traditional triadic nexus, Palestinian solidarity and the BDS movement campaigns connect activists to the on-the-ground politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Directing attention to populations in the occupied territories, these prominent non-violent resistance campaigns advocate for Palestinian rights and challenge Israel's occupation of Palestinian land that marginalise locals.

Smartphone technology and social media platforms have added another personalised user-centred layer to mobilisation activities, which in the latest Israel-Gaza conflict served to strengthen and diversify Palestinian campaign networks across the globe. The instrumental

utility of Internet web 2.0 technologies in connecting transnational solidarity networks is empowering new forms of identity politics that transcend diasporic lines and distinguish the Palestinian case from the two other case studies presented in this thesis. To account for differences across the three case studies, the following chapter presents a comparative analysis of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics.

VII

7. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian Online Diaspora Politics

7.1 Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, I explained that my research project was primarily aimed at understanding how the web is changing global diaspora politics, what these new forms of online identity politics look like, and why these mobilisations matter in contemporary global politics. In this concluding empirical chapter I use the case study results from Chapters 4, 5 and 6 to compare Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics. The chapter begins by summarising and comparing the types of actors that make up each corpus sample. Research data is used to pinpoint the key types of actors that influence online identity politics for each stateless (and leaderless) diasporic entity.

This is followed by a comparative summary of online activities. In this section, web-based content analysis results are complemented with a virtual domain name analysis to illustrate the dominant online narratives and themes for each case study more clearly. The aim is to understand the common frames being employed and how these articulations change the way diasporic grievances, claims and issue agendas interconnect. For example, while human rights-based discourse is common to each case study, the way such discourse is strategically employed and negotiated differs significantly. Online platforms can be used to support mobilisation processes, but they also offer a virtual enabling of community representation and identity formation activities. I use corpus node location data to flesh out the identity-based political bonds of each case study.

To make sense of the multiple functionalities and operational capabilities of Internet web 2.0 technologies, this chapter also considers the location patterns and linguistic mediums used to facilitate online engagement. While the dominance of English makes strategic sense in terms of outreach, the symbolic importance of the mother tongue is highlighted as a source of contention between younger and older generations. There appears to be an identity-based

tension between community maintenance and preservation of language, as against using English as a universal language in terms of political currency in world affairs. The comparative analysis ends with a discussion on impending generational shifts in countries of settlement and how these realities stand to change the forward movement of global diaspora politics.

7.2 What do Actors Tell us about Online Diaspora Politics?

It is important to keep in mind that the case studies presented in this thesis were selected due to their stateless status. Without a defined centre or formalised homeland, non-state actors can use online platforms as a medium of organisation to link dispersed populations together with greater ease, and form online structures which offer an approximation of collective identity. Such diasporic representations maintain comparatively flexible roots because they build from a framework of identity-based political bonds which are not encased by nation-state containers. With this in mind, we can now look to each of the three case studies to gain a better understanding of the role different actors play in shaping the elements of online diaspora politics.

Corpus Distribution - Type of Actor

| Type of Actor | Group | Organisation | Media Organisation | Individual Blogger | Government |
|--|---------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Sikh Corpus (290 nodes) | 34% (99n) | 31% (89n) | 7% (20n) | 23% (68n) | None |
| Tamil Corpus (243 nodes) | 40% (97n) | 19% (45n) | 21% (52n) | 14% (34n) | 2% (6n) |
| Palestinian Corpus (493 nodes) | 43% (211n) | 20% (99n) | 8% (38n) | 22% (110n) | 1% (7n) |

Statistical analysis of corpus structures allows for the deconstruction of multi-faceted actor networks through which diaspora identity politics are maintained online. All corpus nodes were classified based on type of actor, the most significant of which are presented in the table above. The analysis of actor distribution contributes to a better understanding of how the web empowers new forms of global diaspora politics. It is important to first consider the differences that distinguish each type of website actor and what these classifications uncover across each case study.

While the boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred online, groups distinguish themselves from organisations through their lack of formalised codes of conduct. Organisations are commonly noted to distribute tasks and divide roles of responsibility between members (the Sikh religious institutions, for example). Like organisations, groups unite through a shared sense of common goals, beliefs and practices. However, they function through loose networks of supporters (this is most obvious in the Palestinian case) where membership is much more fluid. Media organisations, on the other hand, are distinguished by their explicit focus on disseminating information and resources to audiences using audio-visual materials. Website content can be easily shared through cross-posting and hyperlinks to neighbouring websites (as in the Tamil case). Media organisations help foster connections between different locales in different cities across the globe without necessarily having to rely on text to convey messages.

Individual bloggers differ considerably, in that they invite far more reflexive, expressive and personalised online engagement. Blogs empower contemporary actors from the bottom up and allow individuals to publicly brainstorm, (re)negotiate their identities and/or share their perspectives on contentious political issues with relative anonymity. This is a far cry from government actors, who through their network presence (or lack thereof) confirm that homeland affairs play a role in shaping contemporary diaspora narratives.

Corpus government actors form one of the more notable differences between the three cases. The absence of government actors in Sikh virtual space is attributed to the Sikh collective identity being bound primarily by religion, faith-based practices and Punjabi cultural customs. In the case of Tamil and Palestinian networks, the influence of government actors may be minimal, but their presence highlights the centrality of homeland politics (calls

for self-determination) in shaping the narratives that bind collective identity. Palestinian and Tamil government actors can be summarised as follows:

Palestinian Corpus Exploration: Notable Government Actors:⁷⁶⁹

- UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Occupied Palestinian Territory (*ochapt.org*)
- Negotiation Affairs Department Palestinian Liberation Organisation (*nad-plo.org*)
- PLO Delegation to the United States (*plodelegation.us*)

Tamil Corpus Exploration: Notable Government Actors⁷⁷⁰

- Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka (*news.lk*)
- Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, Geneva Switzerland (*lankamission.org*)
- Consulate General of Sri Lanka in Sydney (*slcsyd.com*)
- The Embassy and Permanent Mission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Vienna Austria⁷⁷¹ (*srilankaembassy.at*)
- Sri Lanka High Commission in Singapore (*lanka.com.sg*)

Corpus exploration results highlight key differences between the two government actor subsets, confirming the flexible boundaries of diaspora identity politics in the online environment. In the Palestinian case, government actors comprise of internationally

⁷⁶⁹ Palestinian Corpus - Type of Actor - Government. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=4§ion=35&value=government>>

⁷⁷⁰ Tamil Corpus - Type of Actor - Government <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=4§ion=26&value=government>>

⁷⁷¹ Accredited to Republic of Austria, Czech Republic, Republic of Croatia, Republic of Hungary, Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Serbia “The Embassy and Permanent Mission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Vienna, Austria,” *Sri Lanka Embassy*, last accessed September 1, 2014. <<http://srilankaembassy.at>>

recognised Palestinian bodies who act as representatives for the Palestinian people in peace negotiation processes, community relations and public outreach activities. Highlighting the muddled boundaries of online inclusion, government actors maintaining a presence in Tamil virtual space actually represent the Sri Lankan government. This includes an official news portal resource, which is dedicated to disseminating government-specific updates on domestic, international and business affairs. As discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) initiative proclaims itself the representative body for the Tamil diaspora globally. Compared to the other two cases, the Tamil case most clearly shows us that when actors harness the power of the Internet, online platforms—as transnational spaces—become a place for contentious politics.

7.2.1 Tamil Virtual Space - Fuelling Tamil Nationalist Identity through Media

The presence of Sri Lankan government actors in the Tamil corpus is attributed to the prominence of news-based activities throughout Tamil virtual space. For Tamil actors, online platforms offer a connective opportunity to share and disseminate newsworthy affairs between transnationally dispersed Tamils and less powerful individuals in the homeland. Corpus distribution statistics indicate that out of the three cases, media organisations maintain the greatest presence in the Tamil corpus (21% of nodes) and that 87% of all Tamil media organisations focus on news-based activities.⁷⁷²

The news media has long been a source of conflict for Tamil activists, who have developed sophisticated networking techniques to counter state-based censorship of Tamil newspapers. Tamil media organisations provide audiences with real-time, raw updates of the on-the-ground realities across the globe. In the summer of 2011, UK's Channel 4 released *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, a ground-breaking investigative documentary which used eye-witness video footage (from smartphones) to expose war crimes committed against innocent Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan military. The choppy, graphic nature of the documentary drew significant attention from the international community. Tamil activists continue to cite the documentary in formulating demands for accountability and justice for the genocidal acts

⁷⁷² Tamil Corpus - Type of Actor - Media Organisation. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=4§ion=26&value=media%2Borganisation>>

committed by Sri Lankan governing authorities. Since this documentary was aired, audio-visual media dissemination has become a standard practice for many Tamil activists.

7.2.2 Palestinian Virtual Space - Internationalising the Palestinian Cause

The continuing relevance of the Palestinian issue in global politics separates online representations of Palestinian identity politics from the two other cases. Because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has received significant attention from the international community for decades, the boundaries of inclusion surrounding Palestinian online networks are looser yet more thematically specific. As discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, one of the key distinguishing features of the Palestinian corpus is the number of non-Palestinian activists who support the Palestinian cause (and the refugee issue), and thus become part of Palestinian diaspora politics.

This makes it increasingly difficult to disentangle online identity politics from transnational social movements or activist networks. Corpus actor statistics most notably highlight the importance of informal groups (43% of the corpus), which characteristically maintain themselves through a fluid network of like-minded supporters sharing common political goals, normative beliefs and practices. The diversity of participants suggests that online platforms serve a supportive function which are instrumental in mobilising activists around on-the-ground politics as well as affecting issue agendas concerning powerless individuals in the Palestinian homeland.

7.2.3 Sikh Virtual Space - Community through Collective Religious Identity

Reflecting the importance of collective identity in fostering connections between transnational Sikh communities, actors use ethno-religious grammar to infuse particularist meaning into cyberspace. Community maintenance and preservation is directly pinned to faith-based practice and builds upon the teachings found in the local Gurdwara. As a mobilising force, these religious institutions are spread globally, and separate the Sikh case from the Tamil and Palestinian cases.

Further distinguishing the Sikh case from the two other stateless communities, we note that support for the Khalistani secessionist movement has steadily declined over time.

Instead of remaining an ongoing political cause, the Khalistani movement of the 1980s has now become far more symbolic. The absence of Sikh political institutions in the ancestral homeland has translated into a discursive shift away from nationalist appeals for independent statehood in Punjab. Instead, contemporary Sikh actors now focus their efforts on strengthening the transnational Sikh community, and use online platforms to build a sense of unity between dispersed community members. Actor distribution statistics indicate that out of the three cases, organisations (31%) and individual bloggers (23%) maintain the greatest presence in the Sikh corpus. This draws attention to the budding relationship between local and transnational networks.

7.2.4 Cross-Comparison

The cross-comparison of corpus actors reveals a gradual widening and an increased flexibility of identity-based collective bonds in shaping global diaspora politics. For example, in a post 9/11 environment, ‘Turban Politics’ has emerged as a key concern for Sikh actors. Organisations like the UN-affiliated United Sikhs have taken an active role in combating hate crimes and discriminatory policies that threaten Sikh articles of faith, which remain central to the identity-based bonds that surround the *panth* (community). The organisation’s international legal director explained that because Sikhs lack a formalised political institution, everyday people bear much of the responsibility of preserving the sanctity of the faith-based community moving forward. In her reflections, she explained online representations of the Sikh collective identity as essential for diasporic representation, commenting, “we don’t have a military, treasury...we are a nation without borders. The web translates to a mechanism, it’s a platform for community messages.”⁷⁷³

Community bloggers use virtual space to publicly negotiate their Sikh identity within individual host country experiences. As a platform of expression, online reinterpretations of the Sikh faith are flexible, and are shaped by the perspectives of the individual blogger. According to blogger American Turban, “when you are discussing religious topics, there is much more emotional investment.”⁷⁷⁴ Alluding to a sense of community being forged through these online engagements, blogger Maple Leaf Sikh explained, “in my mind the Sikh

⁷⁷³ Author interview with United Sikhs (London Chapter) member on 26 March 2012, London, UK.

⁷⁷⁴ Author interview with American Turban on 12 July 2012, California, USA (via email).

blogosphere is very small and everyone knows everyone and you connect to people based on interest and paradigm.”⁷⁷⁵ In this case, online platforms are used to support the religious freedoms necessary for self-defined community members to engage in identity negotiation and collective formations.

For the Tamils, the self-proclaimed diaspora has assumed much of the responsibility for future mobilisations of Tamil Eelam since the defeat of the LTTE. The utility of the web in countering state-based hurdles (censorship/oppression) has been essential to raising greater awareness of the violence that occurred in the North East during the closing stages of the civil war in 2009. Tamil activists diffuse news-based audio/visual media online in an effort to revitalise the identity-based political bonds that connect the transnational Tamil community. A member of the Canadian Tamil Congress, an organisation promoting human rights, pointed to the importance of social media platforms in raising awareness of the organisation’s active contribution to the Tamil nation, “anything we do we promote it online, through Facebook, Twitter...we do programs and put it on YouTube.”⁷⁷⁶

Noting the importance of news media in uniting diasporic perspectives, the webmaster of Tamil Canadian attributed the popularity of the community website to its rich archive of newsworthy resources. He added that in the post-2009 rebuilding phase, online news media offered a repository of information or archive of political narratives for the transnational community to (re)consider moving forward:

“we have come out of a brutal war, with thousands of people killed, and it’s interesting to see this story, and see how the world media sees us. Our main focus is to present the news of world media in the Tamil context.”⁷⁷⁷

The flexibility of Palestinian online networks also suggests that online platforms function to support the mobilisation of community members and non-Palestinian activists. I argue that the longstanding refugee issue not only connects Palestinian diaspora politics to broader world affairs but also distinguishes the Palestinian case from the Sikh and Tamil cases in

⁷⁷⁵ Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷⁷⁶ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷⁷⁷ Author interview with Tamil Canadian member on 22 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

terms of participant diversity. It is interesting to note that many interviewees from the Palestinian corpus implicitly recognised that the multifaceted processes of identity mobilisation have come to define contemporary Palestinian politics.

A member of Toronto-based Palestine House pointed out that the community centre had an overarching interest in Middle Eastern politics, and considered it a key unifying factor between Arabs across countries of settlement: “before 1991, the President of Palestine House was Iraqi. And at one point was Lebanese, there wasn’t any difference because the motivation was political.”⁷⁷⁸ Although many of his daily activities focus on organising local events and activities with Palestine House, he clarified that as a career activist, he was also involved in Canadians Against Israeli Apartheid, BDS, and the Toronto Palestine Film Festival.⁷⁷⁹

The presence of Jewish-led peace organisations in the Palestinian corpus is a clear example of the loose boundaries becoming prevalent in identity-based inclusion online. Introducing herself as a career activist, a founding member of Toronto-based Not in Our Name (NION): Jewish Voices Opposing Zionism explained, “I have a background in political activism, since the 1960s.”⁷⁸⁰ Tracing his involvement with Jewish Voice for Peace, a member of the organisation noted that he had always “been involved in political protests and was trying to find an institution to put energy into.”⁷⁸¹ A member of Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJfP) tasked with maintaining the organisation’s website, added that through her daily online interactions she had become well aware of the sheer diversity of online actors. According to the same interviewee, the flexibility of user-centred online networks facilitates much cross-collaboration between Pro-Palestinian groups, although it can equally be a source of contention between network actors:

“everything is linked, and it’s almost impossible to have absolutely clean links untouched by Jihadism, anti-Semitism...that’s quite difficult...you don’t have a

⁷⁷⁸ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷⁷⁹ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷⁸⁰ Author interview with Not In Our Name (NION) member on 20 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷⁸¹ Author interview with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP) member on 15 May 2012, New York (via Skype)

clear cut ring around yourselves which is very good, but you have to be quite careful about who you're making links with".⁷⁸²

Taking a step back, we can see that respondents in each case frame their advocacy through themes of social justice and human rights. What we observe as global diaspora politics can more broadly be considered as identity-based political expressions of relevant issues and agendas in an online context. In each of the empirical chapters presented in this thesis, online actors were noted to commonly use the universal language of human rights to validate the legitimacy of their claims, whether local, domestic or international. What I find most noteworthy is that the linguistic details of the human rights discourse employed differ considerably in orientation across each case, depending on the aggregated goals.

7.3 The Types of Activities in Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian Virtual Space

The prevalence of rights-based discourse in framing contemporary diasporic grievances and calls to action is considered a key research finding of this thesis. The impact of human rights discourse, however, differs from case to case, and is largely dictated by the community narratives that circumscribe web 2.0 online networks. To better clarify my argument, I examined the web-based content analysis to compare the different narratives and themes that shape contemporary diaspora politics. Comparisons show that website content is noted to focus largely on political grievances, international recognition and cultural reproduction—all within the frame of human rights.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸² Author interview with JFJFP member on 11 May 2012, London, UK.

⁷⁸³ For activism for resistance for protection - (towards countries of settlement, populations or claims in the ancestral homeland, processes of mobilisation and in defense of malleable identities).

| Corpus | Type of Activity | Web-based Content Analysis |
|-------------|---|--|
| Sikh | religion, community, culture, media, news | Sikh, Guru, God, religion, spirit, turban, faith human rights |
| Tamil | news, human rights, community, political rights, media | war, human rights , crimes, reconciliation, military, nation, rights, killing |
| Palestinian | news, community, peace, political rights, protest | rights, occupation, campaign, human rights , support, apartheid, boycott, solidarity |

* a more detailed content analysis is presented in each of the case study chapters

I argue that human rights-based discourse serves as a master frame in contemporary global diaspora politics. This is most striking when considering that amongst numerous differences (voluntary/conflict driven migration, refugee issues where relevant, faith-based identity bonds and homeland activism) human rights is among one of the few similarities between each case study. I consider human rights a framing subject, as human rights discourse contributes a dynamic common platform around which stateless and leaderless diasporic formations can structure themselves and mobilise.

The frame allows non-state actors involved in global diaspora politics to pin claims to the international system and the UN more readily. This in turn allows issue agendas to gain potential support from wider audiences without necessarily compromising the authenticity of claims. The case studies show that the highly malleable discourse of human rights can easily co-exist with the collective identities that define and bind dispersed populations together as diasporas.

Figures 7.1 to 7.3 provide a visual representation of corpus virtual domain name addresses, allowing for a clearer understanding of the dominant identity-based narratives and network activities that shape the online identity politics of each case study. Virtual domain names employ keywords to attract audiences and increase website search engine visibility, which in its aggregated form, plays a role in shaping the conceptual boundaries of online diaspora politics. Domain name addresses are organised around themes of nationhood, statehood and advocacy.

7.3.1 Virtual Frames - Locating Human Rights

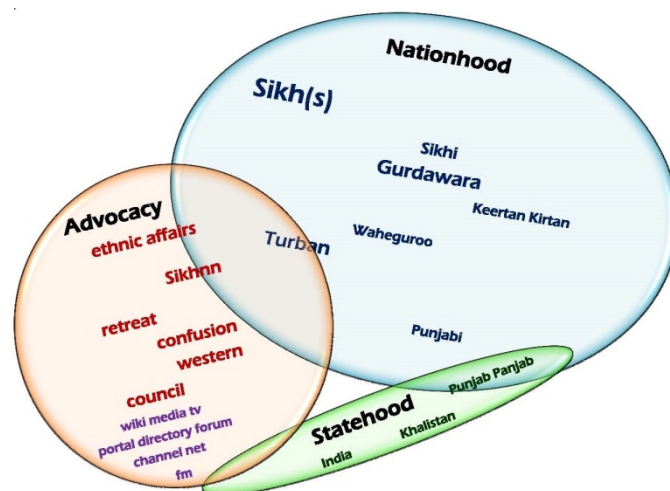


Figure 7.1 Sikh Corpus – Virtual Domain Analysis

Discussed in greater detail in chapter four of this thesis, content analysis results indicate Sikh virtual space to be bounded through notions of collective religious identity. Through ‘ethno-religious grammar’ and Sikh-specific symbols, actors inscribe virtual space with meaning. Contemporary actors strive to provide an alternative resource hub for dispersed community members to actively negotiate, practice and reaffirm their commitment to the Sikh faith. Human rights language is used in the context of diasporic experience, and the challenges many Sikhs face in maintaining their articles of faith (most notably the Turban) in a post 9/11 environment. The web can also function in this regard as a platform for mobilisation around hate crimes and discriminatory policies that threaten the Sikh religious identity. Treating the web as a platform for community representation and identity formation, contemporary actors cater to their online youth populations, whose present-day engagements play a key role in preserving and maintaining the forward movement of collective Sikh identity.

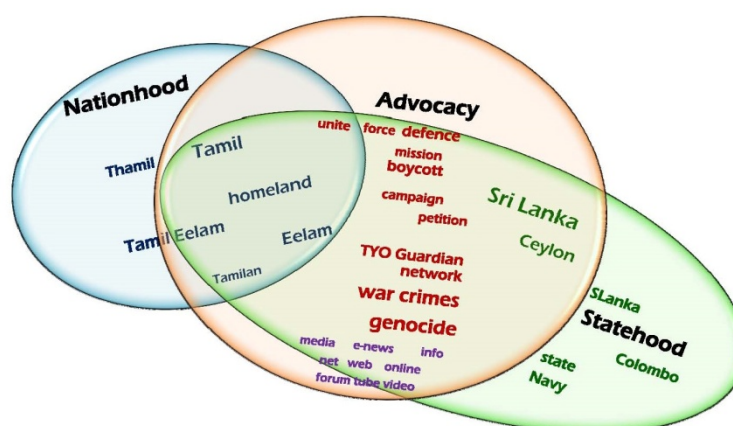
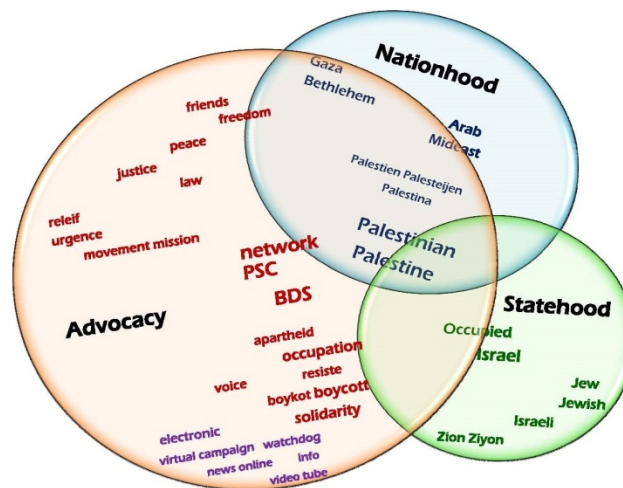


Figure 7.2 Tamil Corpus - Virtual Domain Analysis

Content analysis of the Tamil corpus reveals online diaspora politics to focus mainly on raising awareness of the grave human rights violations committed by the Sri Lankan military during final stages of the civil war in 2009. Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis, Tamil virtual space is noted to serve two main functions. Firstly as a mobilising structure, in which actors seek to gain international recognition for homeland political grievances, and demand accountability from international bodies like the UN. Secondly, by infusing Tamil virtual space with narratives of struggle, contemporary actors push for a decentralisation of the Tamil nation beyond the North East. Online platforms counter state-based censorship and provide a collective space for the transnational Tamil community to unite. In the current rebuilding phase, the web has emerged as the primary hub for contemporary actors to reshape Tamil nationalist identity beyond the legacy of the LTTE.

Figure 7.3 Palestinian Corpus - Virtual Domain Analysis



Palestinian virtual space serves as flexible mobilising structure from which actors organise and coordinate calls to action on a transnational scale. Chapter 6 of this thesis provides a more detailed account of the diverse network of actors and supporters that shape Palestinian online identity politics. Content analysis results indicate that rather than directly engaging in Palestinian diaspora politics, the majority of online activities revolve around issues in the Palestinian homeland. Political grievances associated with the Right of Return and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land are articulated through human rights language as a way of gaining increased support for the Palestinian cause. Palestinian virtual space is best characterised as a loose global network of activists who most commonly express their support for the Palestinian cause by joining prominent solidarity networks and boycott campaigns. The dynamic nature of the web, combined with growing internationalisation of the Palestinian cause, make it increasingly difficult to distinguish online diaspora politics from transnational activist networks.

7.4 The Importance of Location in Global Diaspora Politics

Corpus data⁷⁸⁴ is used to examine the connections between location and transnational mobilisation processes in contemporary diaspora politics for each of the datasets. Statistically, the three corpora exhibit similar distribution patterns, with a prominence of nodes based in the US. While the country registration addresses of corpus nodes are statistically varied, they largely correlate with migration patterns and host country settlement flows. Non-state actors involved in diaspora identity politics approach the cyber domain reflexively, through the lens of local experiences. I find it most striking that in linking the local to the international, London emerges as a key location for domain registration in each of the three corpora. The importance of London as a global city—or at least a city that localises global civil society—has emerged as an important area of research in recent times.⁷⁸⁵ The legacy of the British Empire and colonialism has led to London maintaining a significant power as a focal hub for migration and hyper-diversity, and as such, global constituencies are more likely to engage in transnational identity politics. As discussed in the preceding empirical chapters, each of the case studies has in one-way or another been touched by the British Empire and colonialism (including Mandates in the formation of the UN). Beyond these colonial legacies (and periods of decolonisation), the sheer volume of capital, labour and culture flowing through London today has made the city stand out as a focal hub for global affairs.⁷⁸⁶

In terms of migration flow and settlement, data from the Office of National Statistics indicates that approximately 36% of people living in London are foreign born, which is significantly greater than the rest of the UK (just 13.4%).⁷⁸⁷ Noting these trends, scholars have taken an active interest in exploring London as a global or ‘worldly’ city that easily

⁷⁸⁴ Based on domain address registration details, analysed by coolwhois online software, see methodology chapter 3.

⁷⁸⁵ See for example: Schiller and Çağlar 2009; Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1991); Fiona B. Adamson and Maria Koinova, “The Global City as a Space for Transnational Identity Politics,” *SOAS Working Paper*, London, 2013; Fiona B. Adamson, “Blurring the Lines: Diaspora Politics and Globalized Constituencies,” *World Politics Review*, last Modified July 14, 2015, last accessed November 20, 2015. <<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/16224/blurring-the-lines-diaspora-politics-and-globalized-constituencies>>

⁷⁸⁶ Saskia Sassen, “What Makes a Global City Global?” *Foreign Policy*, 182 (1) (2010): 18.

⁷⁸⁷ Adamson, 2016. Foreign-born population rates in other major cities (New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Sydney) are similar. See: “World Cities Culture Forum.” Accessed February 1, 2016. <www.worldcitiescultureforum.com>

localises global civil society.⁷⁸⁸ For example, Adamson has pointed to the density of institutions (government offices, cultural organisations, media conglomerates, international institutions, NGOs) as a key reason why London is beginning to play an increasingly important role as a site for transnational identity politics. To fully explore the above findings would require further exploration, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, we can at least look to these empirical commonalities as an indication that local socio-political effects increase the opportunities available in the processes of mobilisation.

Corpus Distribution - Location⁷⁸⁹

Percentage of Corpus Nodes

| Corpus | Country | Untraceable |
|--------------------|---|-------------|
| Sikh | USA (32%), UK (18%), Canada (8%), India (5%), Australia (2%) | 22% |
| | <i>Top Locations: California, London, Toronto</i> | |
| Tamil | USA (17%), Sri Lanka (8%), UK (7%), Canada (6%), India (5%) | 39% |
| | <i>Top Locations: Toronto, Arizona, Sri Lanka, London</i> | |
| Palestinian | USA (31%), UK (14%), Canada (7%), Israel (5%), Palestine (4%) | 24% |
| | <i>Top Locations: California, New York, London</i> | |

In the Tamil case, untraceable nodes (39%) are most dominant, and surpass the proportion of nodes located in the US by a significant margin (17%). The legacy of state-based censorship has led many contemporary Tamil actors to disarticulate their web engagements from physical territory. According to the webmaster of Tamil Canadian, the site has fallen victim to censorship in the past because it often posts stories that are critical of the Sri Lankan government. “We were banned in Sri Lanka, I believe that is no longer the case now.”⁷⁹⁰ In an effort to avoid state-based censorship, Tamil actors commonly hide their IP domain

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ Domain address registration details were recorded (when provided), details varied from Country, location cities, states and provinces, depending how the administrator registered the website.

⁷⁹⁰ Author interview with Tamil Canadian member on 22 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

addresses or use proxy servers to decentralise their online presence. Even this partial denial of geography in the form of untraceable proxies signifies a shift away from territory, and gives greater validity to online platforms as a transnational network for the Tamil nation.

Geographical location conversely plays an important role in shaping Sikh diaspora politics. Religious institutions like the Gurdwara promote community cohesion by providing everyday people with a central place to engage in active worship, cultural activities and social events. Host country socio-political realities provide the lens through which Sikh actors approach local issues and identity politics online. According to a member of the Toronto based Sikh Activist Network, the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182 by Sikh separatists has had a lasting impact on Sikh consciousness in Canada:

“if you go to the US and you criticise the state, people get really defensive....we are Canadian, but we’re willing to challenge the Canadian state because of the 26 odd years where we have been labelled as terrorists...before 9/11. So we’ve had a lot longer history of activism.”⁷⁹¹

Corpus location data shows some interesting results in the Sikh case. First, we note that untraceable nodes are significantly lower than in the Tamil case (22% compared to 39%). This is attributed to the differing migration patterns of the two populations. The Sikhs have a long history of voluntary economic migration dating back to the late nineteenth century, and experience no state-based hurdles such as censorship. Second, the online presence of nodes based in Australia (2%), reflects contemporary Sikh migration patterns. Corpus location data in the Sikh case mimics past economic migration patterns of the community.

The usefulness of the web as an instrument for coordination is most apparent when considering the complexity of past and present Palestinian migration patterns. Many respondents with Palestinian origins explained that in the past their family members assumed pseudo-ethnic identities in neighbouring Arab countries to expedite migration. According to the interviewee from Palestine House, decades of displacement resulted in a widening of the conceptual boundaries of the so-called ‘Palestinian’ community in North America:

⁷⁹¹ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

“Palestinians in Lebanon have Lebanese travel documents, people from Jordan are considered Jordanian because they have the passport. Palestinians from Israel are considered Israeli, so you cannot make assumptions at all, it’s very difficult...it’s an open community in that way.”⁷⁹²

An employee of BADIL (Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights), which is based in Palestine also noted, “the issue we are working on is so sensitive, the rights for 5 million refugees, and another 3 million, 8 million in total...it’s complicated on the ground.”⁷⁹³ Grievances associated with displacement offer an explanation as to why the Palestinian case study exhibits significantly less online place-making activities compared to the two other case studies.

Territorial claims form the basis of contemporary Palestinian politics, and using the Internet as an alternative transnational site (as in the Tamil case) would shift focus away from the on-the-ground politics in the homeland. The Right of Return and the Israeli-occupation of Palestinian land remain integral in shaping the contemporary Palestinian narrative as well as fuelling transnational solidarity networks and global BDS movement campaigns. Palestinian online identity politics focus on mobilising international support for the Palestinian cause, and help redirect audiences to issues in the homeland.

Corpus location data emphasises the centrality of homeland issues and territorial claims in the contemporary Palestinian narrative. Highlighting the increased internationalisation of the Palestinian issue, the prominence of nodes based in the US (31%) may reflect the salience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in American foreign policy and international politics. More importantly, nodes based in Israel (5%) and Palestine (4%) confirm that the on-the-ground politics in the homeland play a key role in shaping contemporary Palestinian identity politics.

⁷⁹² Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁷⁹³ Author interview with Badil member on 15 June 2012, Palestine (via Skype).

7.5 The Importance of Language in Contemporary Diaspora Politics

Mapping statistics indicate English as the predominant language of online diasporic activity in each of the three cases presented in this thesis. Similar findings are noted in many of the studies conducted under the e-diasporas Atlas mapping project, which confirm English as the key language of global diaspora politics.⁷⁹⁴ The dominance of English can be attributed to many internal and external factors. At the most basic level, we must acknowledge that over the past few decades, English has emerged as the *lingua franca* for economic, political and scientific global interactions.⁷⁹⁵ The expansion of English as a universal language of human rights, international politics and the digital age are interdependent and are mutually reinforced through ongoing processes of globalisation.⁷⁹⁶

The dominance of English in global diaspora politics may for these reasons be more of a question of operational utility based on common fluency and linguistic capabilities between dispersed populations across various countries of settlement. We can examine the three cases presented in this thesis to gain a more detailed understanding of how local realities influence the linguistic mediums that facilitate online exchange. Reflections from actor respondents indicate that language can sometimes be a source of contention between community members, especially with reference to youth, who may not be fluent in their mother tongue.⁷⁹⁷ While underrepresented online, native languages are commonly used informally in private circles. Native language is also a symbolic marker of collective identity and family kinship, and reaffirms ethno-religious attachments to the ancestral homeland. The dominance of English in contemporary diaspora identity politics presents an interesting cleavage when considering that many actors explained native language as essential to future community maintenance and preservation.

⁷⁹⁴ This resulted in the creation of an extensive corpus of approximately 8,000 migrant websites, and the study of 30 diasporas on the Web. See: <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/>

⁷⁹⁵ Li Wu and Dan Ben-Canaan, "The Impact of Globalisation and the Internet on English Language Teaching and Learning." *Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies*, Harbin (2006): 1; Peter Matthews, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign. Language Education Press, 2000): 209.

⁷⁹⁶ Alastair Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (Harlow, Essex, England: Longman group UK; New York; Longman Pub, 1994).

⁷⁹⁷ The term 'mother tongue' refers to the first language learned at home in childhood (and is still understood). See: "Immigrant Languages in Canada." *Statistics Canada, Government of Canada*, accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_2-eng.cfm>

Representation of Language

Percentage of Corpus Nodes

| Corpus | English | Other |
|---------------|----------------|--|
| Sikh | 85% | Punjabi/English (9%) Spanish (2%) Dutch (1%) |
| Tamil | 57% | Tamil (19%) English/Tamil (12%) English/Sinhalese (5%) English/Tamil/Sinhalese (2%) |
| Palestinian | 80% | English/Arabic (4%) French (2%) German (2%) |

7.5.1 Tamil Virtual Space - Politicised Language

Compared to Sikhs and Palestinians, the Tamil data most visibly demonstrates trends of politicised linguistic identity. Language has long been a source of division and conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese populations in Sri Lanka. This is most often linked to the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, when Sinhalese replaced English as the official language of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). In recalling his experiences in Sri Lanka, a member of the Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC) explained the policy as “a very discriminatory law” which oppressed all minority ethnic groups in the country.⁷⁹⁸ He noted that this was particularly true for Tamil speaking civil servants:

⁷⁹⁸ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

“we were forced learn Sinhala to have government jobs. I had to prove it to the government by sitting in an exam. But for the Sinhalese, it was not needed, they were not required to show their Tamil skills, even though they worked in Tamil areas.”⁷⁹⁹

For the Tamils, homeland grievances build upon government policies enacted by the Sinhalese leaders, whose assertions of Sri Lankan national identity threaten Tamil ethnic identity. The CTC member I interviewed pointed to institutional marginalisation and social exclusion as a key factor in the snowballing grievance narratives that led to the Tamil uprising: “Policy after policy disenfranchised the entire Tamil group. We lost the language, rights, representation, we started losing everything...then came the racial riots.”⁸⁰⁰ While decades in the past, government policies like the Sinhala Only Act continue to inform Tamil sentiments of marginalisation. In contemporary times, the Tamil language carries much symbolic authority and remains an important part of identity-based political bonds maintained online.

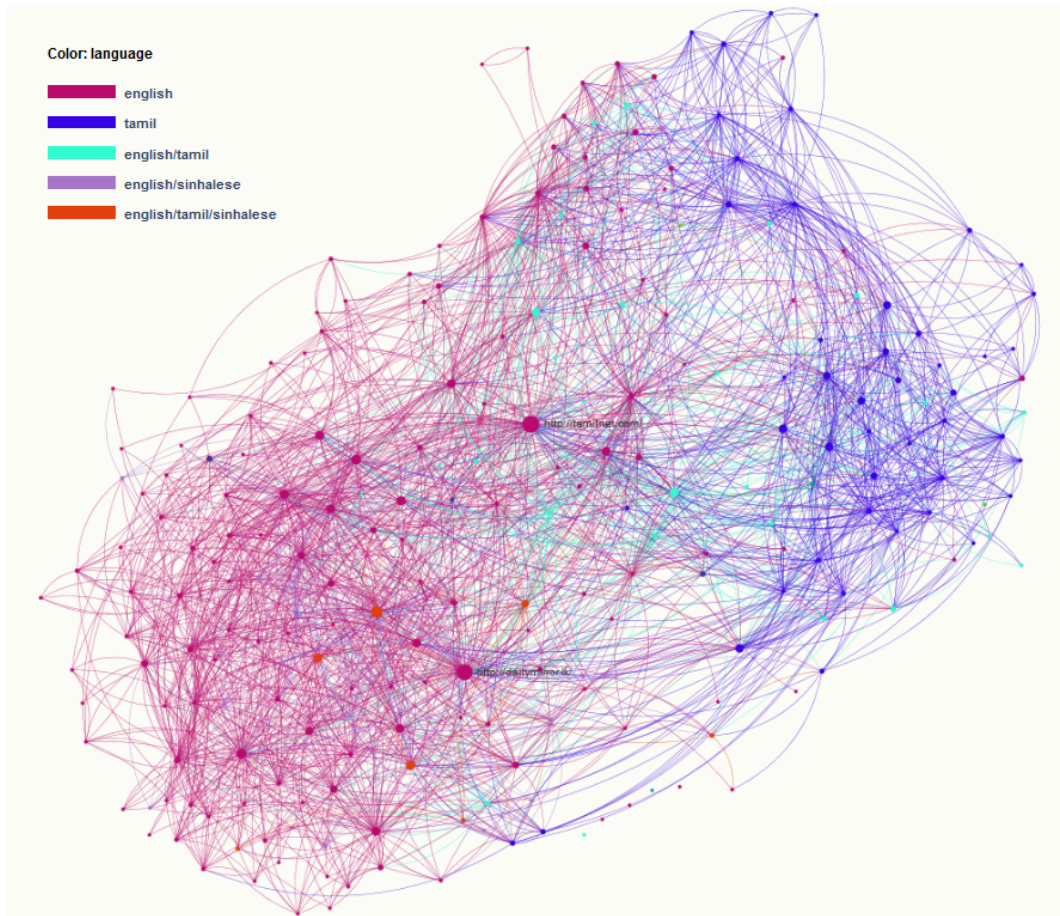
Classifying the Tamil corpus map by language provides a visual representation of the overall influence of language in dividing and clustering node linkages. Statistics reveal 57% (139 of 243 nodes) of the corpus operates in English, which is significantly less compared to both the Sikh (85%) and Palestinian (80%) corpuses. English-based nodes cluster on the left of the corpus structure, and extend their virtual reach through bilingual node linkages. The map highlights the bridging qualities of bilingual English/Tamil nodes, which are positioned in the centre of the corpus structure. While bilingual English/Tamil nodes make up only 12% of the corpus (28 of 243 nodes), they extend their reach and virtual presence by maintaining links with Tamil language nodes. One of the more notable features of the corpus network is the cluster of Tamil language nodes anchored in the right of the structure. Consisting of 46 nodes (19% of the corpus), Tamil language nodes maintain connections with only 33% of all corpus linkages.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁸⁰⁰ Author interview with Canadian Tamil Congress member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁸⁰¹ Tamil Corpus - Language - Tamil. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7§ion=26&value=tamil>>

Figure 7.4 Tamil Corpus - Language



This is significantly lower than websites that operate entirely in English, which maintain connections with 73% of all corpus node linkages.⁸⁰² The dominance of English in the Tamil corpus suggests that actors cater to audiences located outside the ancestral homeland. This may be due to the fact that second and third generation populations are often unable to read and write Tamil fluently, and hold only a conversational knowledge of the language. While corpus statistics highlight the overall dominance of the English language in online interactions, they equally emphasise the Tamil language as a key pillar of diaspora identity politics.

The Tamil language is considered a defining marker of Tamil ethnic identity, and while deemed an official language in 1987, it remains a source of division in Sri Lanka. Language is politicised for the Tamils because it is directly pinned against Sinhalese

⁸⁰² Tamil Corpus - Language - English. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7§ion=26&value=english>>

nationalism and is used to frame demands for political rights and independence in the North East. Fluency in Tamil signifies authenticity and serves as a symbolic boundary mechanism for inclusion and exclusion in homeland politics on the ground. Linking the Tamil language to populations in the territorial homeland, a member of the Tamil Youth Organisation in the UK (TYOUK) noted, “the people in the North East are very protective of language, they say “how can you support the cause if you don’t speak it?”...they get offended when you don’t speak Tamil.”⁸⁰³

Promoting sentiments of collective identity, the Tamil language is used to counter religious diversity within the community, which is largely made up of Hindus and Christians.⁸⁰⁴ Tamils further separate themselves from Sri Lanka through religious differences with the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority who make up 69% of the population in the homeland.⁸⁰⁵ In contextualising the Tamil nationalist struggle for self-determination in the North East, the interviewee from TYOUK explained that narratives of ethno-cultural difference were especially important in shaping second and third generation diasporic consciousness. Expressing his commitment to the Tamil nation, he clarified:

“there’s nothing Sri Lankan about me. The food, the culture, the customs...and I’m Catholic. Personally I reject the Sri Lankan identity and this is apart from my work with TYO. Sri Lanka is another nation for me.”⁸⁰⁶

7.5.2 Sikh Virtual Space - Navigating Diasporic Identity

The language isolation provides a visual representation of the overriding dominance of English in Sikh virtual space. Corpus statistics reveal that 85% of nodes operate entirely in English (246 of 290 nodes).⁸⁰⁷ The 27 bilingual Punjabi/English nodes are scattered

⁸⁰³ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁸⁰⁴ “Sri Lanka,” *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government*, last accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/sri_lanka/sri_lanka_country_brief.html>

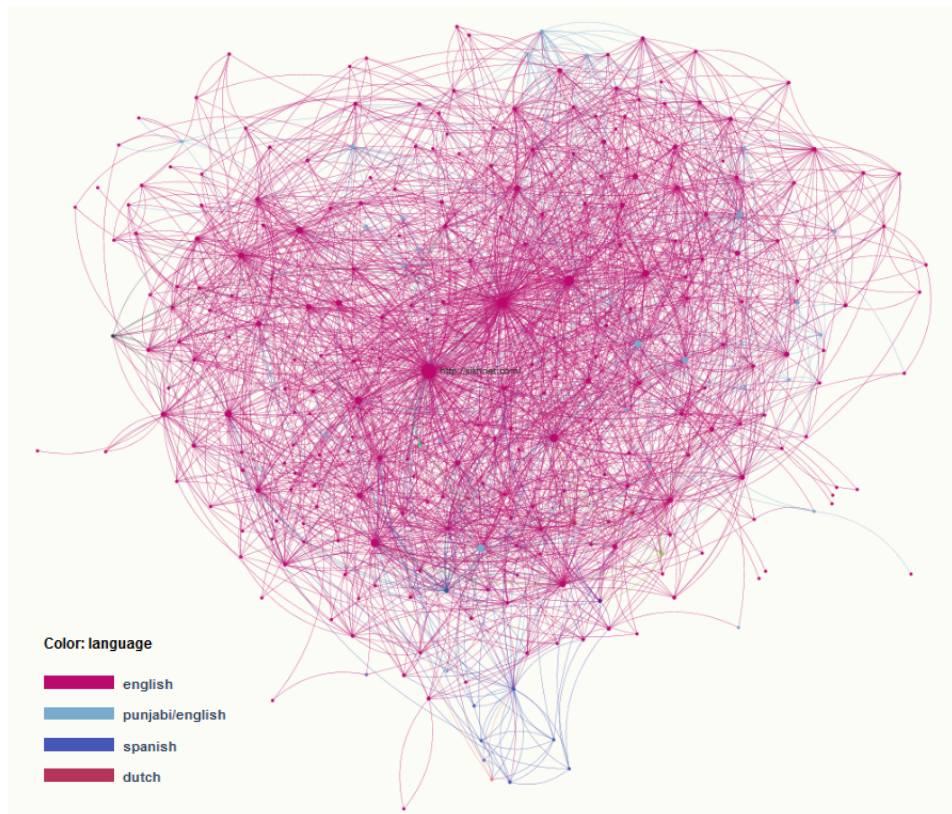
⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁶ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK.

⁸⁰⁷ Sikh Corpus - Language. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=7§ion=27>>

throughout the corpus structure and maintain connections with only 18% of all corpus linkages.⁸⁰⁸

Figure 7.5 Sikh Corpus - Language



English language nodes maintain connections with 97% of all corpus linkages, which is especially notable when compared to the two other case studies presented in this thesis.⁸⁰⁹ In contrast, only 73% of Tamil corpus linkages maintain connections with English language nodes. Discussed in greater detail in the following section, Palestinian corpus statistics

⁸⁰⁸ Sikh Corpus - Language – Punjabi/English. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=7§ion=27&value=punjabi%252Fenglish>>

⁸⁰⁹ Sikh Corpus - Language.

indicate that English language nodes maintain connections with 95% of all corpus linkages.⁸¹⁰

The dominance of English in Sikh virtual space suggests that representations of Sikh identity are largely directed towards globally dispersed audiences. Similar to the Tamil case, second and third generation Sikhs characteristically maintain a limited conversational knowledge of Punjabi, lacking fluency in reading and writing. English minimises linguistic barriers of inclusion, and therefore may take away from the assumed authenticity of religious identity in future community maintenance and preservation.

While underrepresented online, Punjabi remains the official language of the Sikhs, and is used during religious ceremonies and cultural events. The language is also widely spoken by other South Asian ethnic groups, most notably Punjabi Pakistanis and Punjabi Hindus. Data from 2011 census results reveal Punjabi as the second and third most commonly spoken mother tongue in the UK and Canada respectively.⁸¹¹ The Punjabi language is inherently linked to the religious identity of the Sikh diaspora community, which is not the case for other South Asian ethnic groups. According to Toronto-based blogger Maple Leaf Sikh, Punjabi culture can sometimes challenge the religious identity of the Sikh community:

“The Sikh identity in Canada has become synonymous with a greater culture...Punjabi, Indian, South Asian...bhangra music, food...it’s a way for youth to connect with the community. The Punjabi identity becomes a stronger glue...which doesn’t always fit with Sikhism.”⁸¹²

⁸¹⁰ Palestinian Corpus - Language - English. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=7§ion=35&value=english>>

⁸¹¹ “2011 Census: Quick Statistics for England and Wales, March 2011,” *Office for National Statistics*, last accessed September 1, 2014.

<<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-and-quick-statistics-for-wards-and-output-areas-in-england-and-wales/STB-2011-census--quick-statistics-for-england-and-wales--march-2011.html#tab-Main-language>>

“Immigrant Languages in Canada,” *Statistics Canada, Government of Canada*.

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_2-eng.cfm>

“Bilingualism growing, but not in French and English,” *CBC.ca*, last modified October 24, 2012, last accessed September 1, 2014.

<<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/bilingualism-growing-but-not-in-french-and-english-1.1176469>>

⁸¹² Author interview with Maple Leaf Sikh on 22 May 2012, GTA, Canada.

In preserving the Sikh identity, actors stressed the importance of the Punjabi language in fostering connections between local community members. The creator of the UK-based Sikh Directory noted that his linguistic skills had improved as a result of increased engagement at the local level, “I can’t read or write, and I used to speak terrible but when I started meeting Sikhs day in and day out...by speaking to people, it got better.”⁸¹³ The Sikh Directory is circulated in Gurdwaras across the UK, which continue to serve as the primary focal hub for religious congregation, cultural activities and social events for community members. In his reflections, the interviewee pointed to the centrality of the Gurdwara in maintaining Sikh collective identity. He added that youth populations were characteristically less involved in faith-based community activities, a key concern when it comes to planning the future:

“how to get the next generation involved...that is what the Sikh community is looking to. My generation, people in their thirties and forties are fine. If we’re looking at the next generation...10, 12,16 year olds, it’s a nightmare to get them interested in their faith.”⁸¹⁴

Younger generations are able to navigate more freely through Sikh virtual space because it provides an English-based resource hub without the Gurdwara’s hierarchical structure, which can sometimes be intimidating for members with only a conversational knowledge of Punjabi. Online representations of the Sikh identity are complemented with Sikh-specific symbols and ethno-religious grammar particular to the community. Ultimately, these representations are meant to steer audiences to community engagements on the ground (at the Gurdwara). A member of the Toronto-based chapter of the United Sikhs explained that while online platforms may serve as a resource hub for diaspora youth, a central aspect of the Sikh identity is the *active* practice of the faith, “the knowledge you can get at home, but the practising methods...they [youth] only see in the Gurdwara...that’s the place where the valuable teachings are.”⁸¹⁵ Noting a generational shift within the community, he

⁸¹³ Author interview with Sikh Directory member on 15 March 2012, London, UK.

⁸¹⁴ Author interview with Sikh Directory member on 15 March 2012, London, UK.

⁸¹⁵ Author interview with United Sikhs (Toronto Chapter) members on 23 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

acknowledged that while faith-based practices may indeed change over time, the authenticity of the Sikh identity is inherently structured around the Gurdwara:

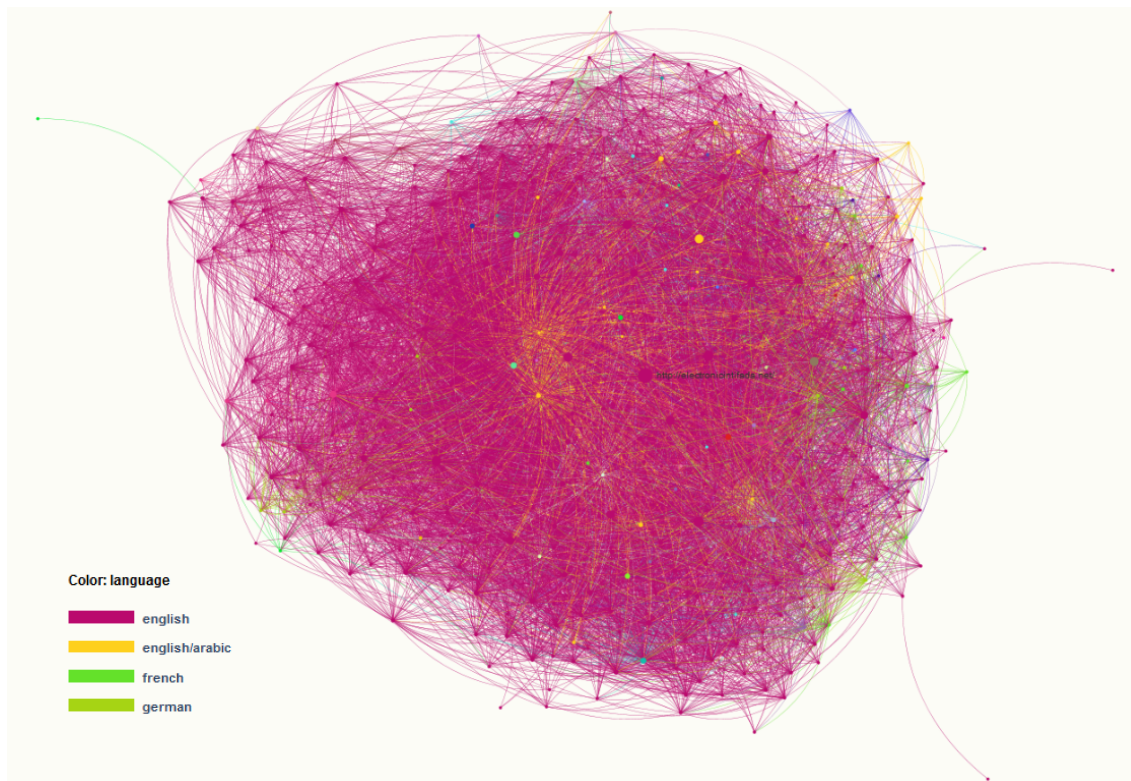
“these young kids are probably not going to cook Punjabi food. Maybe the procedures of serving will change tomorrow, but the Langar [communal kitchen] will be there. I asked two kids under 5, “what are you going to do with the Langar when you’re older?” They said, “uncle, we’re going to do a pizza Langar”...so their thought is different, but the importance of Langar is the same, just a different method.”⁸¹⁶

7.5.3 Palestinian Virtual Space - Transnational Audiences

One of the key defining features of Palestinian virtual space is the prominence of non-community members, who in support of the Palestinian cause use the webspace to join transnational Palestinian solidarity networks. Compared to Sikh and Tamil diaspora communities, Palestinian online identity politics conflate identity-based political bonds with political interests and supporters of the Palestinian cause. Trumping cultural and social activities, online platforms are used to mobilise around the ground-level politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and therefore cater to transnational audiences.

⁸¹⁶ Author interview with United Sikhs (Toronto Chapter) members on 23 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

Figure 7.6 Palestinian Corpus - Language



While operating predominately in English, Palestinian virtual space is multilingual and includes a variety of languages such as Arabic, French, German, Italian, Hebrew and Dutch.⁸¹⁷ Corpus statistics indicate that 80% of all nodes operate entirely in English (394 of 493 nodes).⁸¹⁸ English language nodes maintain connections with 95% of all corpus linkages, which is significantly greater than in the Tamil case.⁸¹⁹ Overall, the dominance of English and the diversity of global languages online reflects the growing internationalisation of the Palestinian cause.

English is used to tackle the linguistic barriers that would otherwise impede the ability of actors and supporters to organise and coordinate transnational solidarity campaign networks. Online representations of the Palestinian community do not cater to the Palestinian diaspora specifically. Bilingual English/Arabic language nodes represent only 4% of corpus

⁸¹⁷ Palestinian Corpus - Language. <<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=7§ion=35>>

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

nodes (19 of 493 nodes) and maintain connections with only 9% of all corpus linkages.⁸²⁰ According to a member of the Toronto based Palestine House, increased technological literacy over the last decade has impacted the linguistic mediums that facilitate Palestinian online exchanges:

“in the last 10-15 years even people in the Arab world have started speaking English. People and students communicate, feel at ease with it...when I send out emails in Arabic, I receive messages back in English.”⁸²¹

In his reflections, my respondent pointed to a hierarchy of community priorities, which often translate into youth populations engaging in political activism as opposed to local community-led cultural and social events. While the majority of online engagements in Palestinian virtual space occur in English, this is not the case on the ground. Community elders, who treat ethnic language as necessary in community-led engagements, commonly use Arabic. The interviewee pointed out that because diaspora youth often possess only a conversational knowledge of Arabic, they sometimes experienced difficulty when organising community-specific events:

“the younger generation are not as involved in the social activities of Palestine House, their Arabic is not that great. The parents try to teach them, but they give up easily...they say “as far as he can understand it’s okay”.”⁸²²

7.6 Community Preservation and Maintenance: Generational Shifts

In each of the three case studies, community maintenance and preservation was discussed in the context of the generational shifts occurring in countries of settlement. The interviewee

⁸²⁰ Palestinian Corpus - Language – English/Arabic.<<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=86&map=68&nodeattribute=7§ion=35&value=english%252Farabic>>

⁸²¹ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁸²² Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

from Palestine House explained that because the perspectives of youth populations are largely informed by host country socio-political realities, community elders are often reluctant to pass on and share organisational leadership:

“there is a difference in social perspectives, the older generation is more conservative and the community centre cannot always accommodate youth understandings and perspectives. People who are 45 and above... they don’t want to get the youth involved in the leadership.”⁸²³

Younger diasporic members frame their community engagements through the principles of human rights and democracy, which sometimes run counter to the normative values of older generations. Although religion maintains a limited presence in Palestinian virtual space, it can indeed provide a source for internal divisions between generations at the local level. Promoting principles of human rights, progressive youth activists often form coalitions with external activist networks that combat discrimination against minorities. The interviewee from Palestine House pointed to LGBTQ issues as the one of the key sources of contention between Palestinian youth activists and community elders:

“It’s a sensitive issue for elders, but we try to educate our community. I argue and debate with people...because it’s a human rights issue. People shouldn’t be discriminated against. The majority of Arabs, Palestinians who are here [in Canada], immigrated and are minorities. If we discriminate against the gay and lesbian community, that justifies discrimination against us, as a community.”⁸²⁴

In the Sikh case, progressive youth actors fuse faith-based teachings and Punjabi culture with themes of social justice in an effort to modernise and strengthen the diaspora community for the future. Youth actors for this reason have taken a staunch approach in exposing cultural taboos, such as domestic violence, farmer suicide in Punjab and alcohol/drug addiction. A

⁸²³ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁸²⁴ Author interview with Palestine House member on 21 June 2012, GTA, Canada.

moderator from the prominent Sikh online forum The Langar Hall noted that in promoting social justice, youth actors sometimes experienced opposition from community elders. “When you write or talk about equal rights, human rights, specifically our LGBT brothers and sisters...not all Sikhs, just like the regular population, agree on the issue.”⁸²⁵ Countering cultural gender biases, he explained that youth actors use horizontal online platforms to extend community services beyond the top-down male dominated hierarchical structure of the Gurdwara:

“far too many of us have heard from within the community about domestic violence against Punjabi women...so we say enough is enough, many of us identify ourselves as feminists in some way or another and so we try to engage in this.”⁸²⁶

While the Gurdwara indeed remains the focal hub of the Sikh community, progressive youth actors push for social change, which can sometimes be threatening for community leaders. A member of the Toronto based Sikh Activist Network (SAN) pointed out that because the organisation addressed “inconvenient issues”, they were met with opposition —especially from conservative community leaders. “We are very opinionated, so a lot of the time, people don’t like to have us at the table.”⁸²⁷ As a student-led initiative, undergraduates make up most of the executive committee of the SAN, which is supported by young professionals and high school teenagers who often act as volunteers for locally held events.⁸²⁸

Because Gurdwara institutions focus on active religious practice and faith-based teachings, they do not provide the necessary flexibility for diaspora youth to openly raise questions and (re)negotiate their religious identities with confidence. Filling this gap, progressive youth actors commonly discuss faith in relation to the host country’s socio-political realities, promoting an empowering a sense of (re)discovery and ownership of the Sikh identity. Many local Gurdwaras for example, offer weekly Punjabi lessons, and cater for

⁸²⁵ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁸²⁶ Author interview with Langar Hall member on 11 April 2012, California, USA (via Skype).

⁸²⁷ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

⁸²⁸ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

youth who would otherwise never have the opportunity to improve their reading and writing skills.⁸²⁹ Mirroring local Gurdwara institutions, online representations of the Sikh identity provide audiences with educational resources including religious scripture, Turban tying tutorials and cultural practices.

Contemporary Sikh actors are critical of superficial replications of religious practices, which they argue do not guarantee community preservation at the individual level. In tracing her involvement with the SAN, the same interviewee explained that many diaspora youth feel a sense of alienation because their values are neither fully acknowledged nor represented by local Gurdwara hierarchies:

“not that anyone said anything to you at the Gurdwara... it’s a sort of imagined judgement...which I have felt in my experience. These [SAN] youth are trying to change that, by supporting progressive community. I really liked it, because I felt like it represented social change and social justice.”⁸³⁰

In the Palestinian and Sikh cases, contemporary community maintenance and preservation is contextualised through pre-existing social structures. The internationalisation of the Palestinian cause serves as the backdrop for contemporary diaspora identity politics, which sometimes threaten the authenticity of community representations. Political narratives centred on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and human rights hamper the ability of community actors to respond to internal generational shifts that endanger the conservation of Palestinian cultural heritage in countries of settlement. In the Sikh case, community maintenance and preservation is entrenched in the religious authority of the local Gurdwara. Expanding on the faith-based teachings disseminated by these community focal hubs, progressive youth actors readdress collective representations of the Sikh identity through their diasporic experiences.

⁸²⁹ “Punjabi Classes,” *Ealing Gurdwara, London Sikh Centre*, last accessed September 1, 2014.

<<http://www.ealinggurdwara.org.uk/punjabi-classes/>>

“Welcome to the Official SGSS Southall Website,” *Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall*, last accessed September 1, 2014. <<http://www.sgsss.org/>>

“Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara Society,” *Delta/Surrey Sikh Temple*, last accessed September 1, 2014.

<<http://www.gurunanakgurdwara.ca/>>

“Khalsa Community School,” last accessed September 1, 2014.

<<http://www.khalsacommunityschool.com/>>

⁸³⁰ Author interview with Sikh Activist Network (SAN) member on 13 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

The internal generational cleavages for both of these communities are far more visible than in the Tamil diaspora, which since the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, has remained in a post-conflict rebuilding phase.

Narratives of struggle and oppression in the North East continue to fuel transnational Tamil nationalist sentiments. Community maintenance and preservation is contextualised by the events of 2009 and the leadership vacuum left by the LTTE. Since this time, transnational community networks have played key roles in reinforcing the identity of the Tamil nation, which extends beyond North East Sri Lanka. Community members unify through shared ethno-cultural markers (language) and collective homeland memories. In the current rebuilding phase, Tamil actors seek to raise awareness of the war crimes committed by governing authorities during the closing stages of the 27-year Sri Lankan civil war. A member of the Tamil Youth Organisation in the UK (TYOUK) noted that since 2009, youth populations have emerged as key players in Tamil diaspora politics, “the younger 15 to 20 year olds are very nationalist and are clear on what they are: Tamil...the political situation has changed.”⁸³¹

Young Tamil activists are unapologetic in their support for the national liberation of Tamil Eelam in the North East. Tamil long-distance nationalism however, lacks the organisational structures that encase the Sikh formations (Gurdwara institutions) and the Palestinian mobilisation processes (internationalised political cause). Hence, while actors use online platforms to strengthen transnational Tamil identity, the local community networks remain structurally less well-defined. According to the webmaster of community website Tamil Canadian, one of the main challenges to the current rebuilding phase has been managing the diverse array of actors that have mobilised since 2009:

“there are some very good youth who are taking up the cause. On the other hand, it’s not clear, there’s no coordinating or organising to work together within the various organisations of the diaspora.”⁸³²

⁸³¹ Author interview with Tamil Youth Organisation (TYOUK) member on 20 September 2012, London UK

⁸³² Author interview with Tamil Canadian member on 22 July 2012, GTA, Canada.

Through diverse alternative perspectives, online actors strive to raise awareness of the Tamil struggle for transnational visibility and international recognition. Online platforms have been particularly effective in loosening generational and geographical barriers of inclusion that have deterred youth populations from engaging in homeland advocacy in the past. The user-centred nature of web 2.0 facilitates citizen-led journalism, connecting dispersed populations to the on-the-ground politics in the North East.

Based in Sri Lanka, Groundviews is a notable online venture, that specifically targets audiences between the ages of 18 and 34 in the homeland and locations across the globe.⁸³³ “Multiple truths, as opposed to a single narrative, guide the content and curation on the site”, explains the editor of Groundviews.⁸³⁴ He added that in promoting progressive citizen-led journalism, the main objective of the website was to, “provide content and perspectives that reflect as well as challenge dominant ideas and fears in the Tamil community, in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora.”⁸³⁵

Each of the case studies presented in this thesis highlight youth as emerging key actors in contemporary diaspora politics. Youth characteristically offer progressive perspectives to diasporic collective identities, which can sometimes threaten the embedded narratives that serve as the basis of community hierarchies on the ground. Native language carries with it ethnic attachments, which are commonly rooted in nationalist and/or religious identity. Youth actors compensate for their limited knowledge of native languages via their diasporic experiences, and use the web to bypass community hierarchies (leaders, elders) that would otherwise obstruct engagement in diaspora politics on the world stage.

7.7 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter highlight some interesting trends and patterns within Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian online identity politics, as well as some interesting comparisons. Mapping results confirm English as the dominant language of global diaspora politics in each case, which makes sense from a strategic perspective. Non-state actors involved in diaspora identity politics can more easily network locally and globally and become part of world

⁸³³ Author interview with Editor of Groundviews 19 March 2012, Sri Lanka (via email).

⁸³⁴ Author interview with Editor of Groundviews 19 March 2012, Sri Lanka (via email).

⁸³⁵ Author interview with Editor of Groundviews 19 March 2012, Sri Lanka (via email).

affairs by using English. My research also demonstrated that native language serves as an especially important symbolic marker in Sikh religious identity and Tamil nationalist identity. Sikh actors engage in significant identity-based online activities, using ethno-religious grammar and Sikh-specific symbols to infuse their online community with meaning. Functioning as platform for community representation and identity formation, Sikh virtual space builds on the teachings and activities of Gurdwara institutions, but caters more specifically to the diasporic experience.

Generational shifts are a common theme in each case study, but were most notable in the Sikh and Tamil cases. Palestinian youth activists direct their engagements towards homeland issues and become absorbed into a larger framework of transnational activists supporting the Palestinian cause. In the Sikh case, inter-generational tensions stem from active (re)interpretations of faith, which community leaders fear may compromise the authenticity of the religious identity moving forward.

Promoting Tamil nationalist identity, younger members of the diaspora play a particularly important role in decentralising the Tamil nation online, disarticulating sentiments of Tamil nationhood from the Sri Lankan state in their reflections. Online platforms offer transnational spaces for dispersed community members to connect, share information and raise awareness of homeland grievances with limited state-based restrictions. For these reasons, Tamil virtual space serves as a supportive tool for political mobilisation and functions as an enabling platform for community representation and identity formation. In contrast, a key distinguishing feature of Palestinian virtual space is the number of non-Palestinians who support the Palestinian cause. Maintained transnationally, Palestinian virtual space is multilingual, reflecting the growing internationalisation of the political cause. Virtual space serves as an instrument for political mobilisation around issues in the Palestinian homeland, limiting online place-making activities.

VIII.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Research Questions Revisited

At the start of this thesis, I presented three snapshots to demonstrate that Internet web 2.0 technologies have become an integral feature of contemporary global politics. By drawing attention to the real-world implications of cyberspace, I pointed out that state-centric approaches guiding mainstream International Relations—and specifically the study of diasporas—have been slow to recognise the impacts of the dramatic rise of online identity politics in global affairs. The thesis set out to explain the growing interconnectedness between online political participation, identity-based expressions and offline political mobilisation activities. I sought to explore the various ways in which comparatively resource-poor and less powerful non-state actors use online platforms to publicly engage in diaspora politics, and how these transnational network processes empower new forms of identity politics that warrant a more focused analysis.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that the theoretical and methodological⁸³⁶ weaknesses of state-based approaches have made it extremely difficult for IR scholars to capture and fully grasp the extent to which new technologies are changing the conduct of world politics from the bottom up. A review of key theoretical approaches, shared understandings and debates surrounding the concept of ‘diaspora’ (and its associated politics) in Chapter 2 revealed that a state-centric focus often ends up reifying primordial assumptions that essentialise notions of collective identity to a particular homeland. Containing the study of global diaspora politics to a triadic relationship between the diaspora as a single bound entity, the host country, and the ancestral homeland might be empirically convenient but offers a misleading and overly

⁸³⁶ This thesis used an online focus to confront ‘methodological nationalism’ and move beyond ethnically bound lenses that scholars (such as Schiller and Çağlar 2009) have argued homogenise ‘groups’ and ignore internal differences (between gender, class, religious affinities, values, norms and so on) that may in fact act as intra-diasporic cleavages or sources of conflict. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I argued that a transnational lens is better suited to critically assess (rather than reduce) the ways that diasporic ties, attachments and loyalties are mobilised and expressed in relation to the ancestral homeland.

simplistic representation of the identity-infused engagements that make up diaspora politics in today's digital age. Two interrelated research questions were used to guide this study:

- 1) How is the Internet—particularly web 2.0 technologies—changing the contours of global diaspora politics?
- 2) What is the impact of the World Wide Web on diaspora identity politics and why does this matter in world affairs?

These research questions were designed to shed light on the growing relevance of cyberspace as an arena for communicating and constructing politics; a social phenomenon that remains under-theorised and under-researched in IR. The thesis therefore points to a much larger dynamic of change in the everyday practices of contemporary global politics whereby ordinary people can use online tools to more readily participate in and visualise identity-based global politics in multiple locales. I have argued that the “new voices”⁸³⁷ of diasporic identity mobilisations are widening the scope of politics, and are now pushing IR scholars to proactively (re)assess the power of digitised practices, performances and experiences in world affairs that lie beyond the confines of the nation-state.⁸³⁸

In addressing the above questions, the thesis employed a three-pronged research methodology (outlined in Chapter 3) that included both online and offline data collection strategies. The three web-based empirical case studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 traced the online presence of three stateless diasporas—the Sikhs, the Tamils and the Palestinians, and probed into the key activities and issue agendas that interlinked each corpus network structure. Using a web-led approach, the thesis went beyond descriptive theorisations of ethnically bound groups or diasporas as ‘things’. Instead, it advocated for greater, more precise consideration of identity-based activities and shared political interests that are

⁸³⁷ Choucri 2012, 23.

⁸³⁸ As I discussed in Chapter 2, much of the migration and diaspora scholarship continues to implicitly anchor notions of identity to a particular nation-state. While a reflexive interplay exists between these two concepts, my argument runs in tandem with contemporary scholars who have questioned the mutually reinforced relationship or ‘container’ approaches between identity and nation-states (Varadarajan 2010). Mindful of ‘territorial traps’ (Agnew 1994), I approached identity as a concept that can be simultaneously both local and global (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). The decentralised and asynchronous nature of online platforms provides the ideal transnational opportunity (Adamson and Demetriou 2007) to study diaspora mobilisation processes with minimal territorial/vertical restraint.

transnationally mobilised and constructed in the name⁸³⁹ of a particular diaspora (on behalf of dispersed people or ancestral homeland). Below I will summarise the implications of the project's research findings in relation to wider debates about the constituent processes of diaspora, and how collective identities⁸⁴⁰ become politically relevant in world affairs with the help of Internet web 2.0 technologies. This is followed by a discussion on the limitations of the research project and recommendations for future work in this timely and socially relevant area of political research.

8.2 Summary of Study and Key Findings

This thesis set out to explore online identity politics through a diasporic prism—a relatively new area of study in global politics. The research findings of the study demonstrated that Internet technologies have enhanced the connective opportunities and communicative capabilities of non-state actors directly and indirectly involved in global diaspora politics. In the preceding chapters, results from each empirical case study (obtained through corpus maps, webCA and interviews) reinforced my contention that online platforms empower new and more public forms of personalised identity politics through two distinct functionalities. Firstly, as a mobilising structure, online platforms can be seen to serve a supportive function, offering dispersed populations a decentralised instrument to streamline and coordinate calls to action on the ground. Secondly, and arguably more relevant to the ubiquity of digital technologies today, the user-centred nature of web 2.0 was shown to enable new forms of connectivity and connective⁸⁴¹ action. This means that the instrumental use of web 2.0 has led to a wider variety of online political expressions—clusters of engagements that in their network aggregates emerge as actions in themselves—actions that do not necessarily mobilise into collective action offline.

This distinction led me to clarify that the decentralised and asynchronous characteristics of web 2.0 can be seen to empower multidimensional forms of diaspora politics. The network mobilisation processes studied in this project were not as clear-cut or contained as mainstream state-centric thinking would claim. As evidenced by the network

⁸³⁹ As I presented in Chapter 2, this mirrors Brubaker's (2005) contention that diasporas are best theorised not as bound groups, but rather as 'idioms, stances, claims'. In the online environment, notions of 'diaspora' have become word of politics in its own right (Ragazzi 2012).

⁸⁴⁰ Baser 2015, 15; Adamson 2012.

⁸⁴¹ On 'connective' action: Bennett and Segerberg 2012, 2013.

linkage patterns studied in each case study chapter, the landscape of global diaspora politics is rapidly changing in the digital age, and extends well beyond triadic relational models. Cyberspace is changing the contours of diaspora identity politics through its capacity for resource mobilisation. For example, online content produced and transmitted as a method of outreach (to mobilise calls to action on the ground), end up ‘sticking’, and contributing to a repository or virtual archive of collective information and knowledge that can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, with open Internet access.

From a social movement perspective, I used Big Data research methods to help trace the various ways in which online platforms operate as transnational springboards for a multitude of diasporic grievance narratives, political claims and issue agendas. In my criticism of primordial assumptions, I argued that links to the homeland are increasingly being digitised through diasporic language markers. In Chapter 3 I analysed the visual make-up and homepage content of sample websites. I explained the methodology behind their construction in order to consider the ways in which online expressions convey meaning and connect the local to the global by functioning as reference points between geographically dispersed populations. New web 2.0 functionalities have superseded previous, non-interactive internet technology to facilitate all the processes in this new recognition of historical and diasporic processes.

The case study findings showed that ethno-religious grammar and community-specific symbols play a crucial role in structuring and maintaining transnational identity-based bonds online. This is because everyday people empowered with technical resources can liquefy, (re)imagine and (re)construct primordial loyalties autonomously with significantly greater ease than ever before. Websites that communicate moral sentiments, share notions of collective identity or express feelings of imagined belonging can help consolidate online political discourses⁸⁴² (norms and goals). Even so, the user-centred nature of online platforms means that past memories (grievance narratives) are publicly available and openly accessible: meaning they are received, experienced, contested and internalised differently. As will be discussed below, each of the three empirical cases highlighted the fact that web-based (identity, activity, and issue) networks offer numerous connective links

⁸⁴² Choucri 2012, 23.

between diaspora identity politics and contemporary global politics. These findings push the triadic model even further from the reality of global diaspora politics.

8.3 Summary of Case Studies - Key Findings

Diaspora Identity Politics as Global Politics through Human Rights

In the Sikh case (Chapter 4), online narratives were found to focus largely on faith-based religious practices, cultural representation and collective identity preservation activities. Findings suggested that Sikh virtual space was part of a broader diaspora project, maintained by and directed towards globally dispersed, self-defined participant members; particularly youth populations who, according to respondents, represented the future of the Sikh nation (*panth*). The examination of online mobilisation activities centred on contemporary threats to the Sikh religious identity, most notably the post 9/11 backlash experienced by Turban-wearing Sikhs in countries of settlement. Building on local Gurdwara institutions, webspace in this case appeared to serve as an additional site for (comparatively progressive) Sikh-specific knowledge dissemination designed to educate external audiences and readdress claims of injustice dating back to 1984 through the language of human rights.

In the Tamil case (Chapter 5), online narratives of mobilisation were seen to link themes of international recognition and human rights abuses to the struggle for self-determination in North East Sri Lanka. The web played an instrumental role in coordinating the mass mobilisations of 2009—protests that received widespread attention from mainstream media outlets. Internet web 2.0 technologies have become integral to the Tamil struggle, and remain one of the few ways in which populations in the North East can bypass government authority and share their own realities with limited barriers. Since the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, non-state actors (especially tech-savvy youth) who represent (or at least claim to represent) the transnational Tamil community have assumed much of the authority over the future of Tamil Eelam. For the Tamil diaspora, web-enabled nationalist sentiments appear to decentralise and dislodge notions of Tamil collective identity from territorial containers of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

In the Palestinian case (Chapter 6), the empirical findings showed that grievance narratives remain pinned to refugee claims and the right of return (through international

bodies like the UN). As part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and as a cornerstone of Middle Eastern regional politics more broadly, no other political issue has gained as much attention from the international community as the question of Palestine. The research findings suggested that online platforms serve mainly as a supportive function, helping to coordinate and mobilise calls to action on the ground in solidarity with resource-poor Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. One of the key distinguishing features of Palestinian virtual space are the non-Palestinian ‘cause-based’ activists who end up engaging in diaspora identity politics in support of Palestinian refugees and their associated land claims. Interestingly, Jewish-led peace organisations play an important role in these transnational advocacy networks and mobilisation activities. The increased internationalisation of the Palestinian cause continues to widen the conceptual boundaries of Palestinian virtual space. In this case, simple diasporic representations are overshadowed by an ever-growing loose network of cause-based activists who use the web to mobilise around human rights-based issues in the territorial homeland.

The comparative examination of online identity politics presented in Chapter 7 revealed important similarities between the three empirical cases, which helped in teasing out the shifting dynamics of power and influence in contemporary global politics. As I have already acknowledged, the master frame⁸⁴³ of human rights plays a key role in binding leaderless (stateless) diasporic grievances, claims and issue agendas together. In each empirical case, human rights-based language was found to offer a streamlining bridge between everyday people across various locales, countries of settlement and the international system (centred around the UN).

In the comparative chapter, the role of London as a key location of global identity politics was also noted. This is a potentially vital link in future explorations of online diaspora mobilisation. While a more in depth analysis would be required to confirm my hypothesis, I believe that London—perhaps more than any other emerging global city (Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Tokyo) experiences comparatively higher levels of diversity in many different fields, whether in terms of financial or institutional diversity, cultural diversity, foreign born populations or demographic variation. A study of London and its treatment of diasporic populations in terms of on-the-ground networks as well as institutions and online identities would reveal much about the present state of diaspora

⁸⁴³ See: Benford 2013 and chapter 2 of this thesis.

politics and online integration, and would be a fruitful area of future research. The importance of London is mixed with a legacy of British colonialism that touches each of the case studies differently, making London stand out as a major hub for matters of world politics. The dominance of English (as an international language) would accordingly make strategic sense, as it is universally applicable, and reduces barriers of communication between and within online-offline environments across many different locales.

From my research findings, I suggested that the discourse on human rights adds organisational scaffolding around horizontally networked online platforms that are malleable enough to accommodate different narratives of migration (voluntary or conflict driven patterns), refugee issues, and faith-based collective identities on a transnational scale. By embracing a rights-based approach, non-state actors involved in global diaspora politics can create open-ended opportunities to gain or leverage support from wider audiences without having to necessarily compromise particular loyalties or emotional attachments to the ancestral homeland (real or imagined). Politicised aspects of collective identity can cluster around or link in to world affairs with significantly greater ease through these strategic framing processes. This is important because it shows us that in the digital age, grievance narratives and political claims (whether Sikh, Tamil, Palestinian or other) are being acknowledged and framed not just as diasporic problems, but as international issues affecting international politics.

8.4 Implications

As outlined in Chapter 1, this thesis is based on the premise that online platforms are enhancing the communicative opportunities necessary for transnational identity construction and transnational political mobilisation. In addition to discussing the key empirical findings of the thesis, this concluding chapter offers a number of explanations as to why the rise of online diaspora politics has only recently attracted the attention of mainstream research. The contribution of this thesis is theoretically and methodologically significant to IR scholarship and global politics more generally for two key reasons. Firstly, the thesis advances existing arguments that cyberspace is now an important part of everyday politics; the political climate of the digital age is one that connects various domestic locales to the international system. The research findings of this thesis show that cyberspace empowers new communicative

strategies and invites new vocalisations of content and knowledge which can help strengthen political discourses and generate new virtual arenas of organisation.⁸⁴⁴ It is worth stressing that while these points may seem obvious, or common knowledge, the discipline of IR and global politics has failed to keep up to date with the technological advances that have come to define the last decade. To fully grasp how the digital age is challenging matters of international politics and relations implies the wilful adoption of innovative methodologies (including technological expertise from other disciplines) and theoretical approaches that go beyond the high politics of state-centric thinking. This has not happened, yet. I am in no way suggesting that the importance of the nation-state in matters of world affairs is diminishing or ought to diminish. Instead, my point is that the many-to-many⁸⁴⁵ communications being nurtured online can no longer be negated as matters of ‘low politics’. The online forms of diaspora politics presented in this thesis shows that the dynamic, flexible and asynchronous nature of cyberspace empowers new and more public expressions of politics that intertwine and hybridise online-offline environments.

This leads to my second point. Using the case of global diaspora politics, the thesis has shown that online platforms are decentralising and bypassing traditional state-centric hierarchies of power that have conveniently interlocked understandings of identity to territorial nation-state containers for decades.⁸⁴⁶ The research findings of each empirical case study support my argument that the very constitution of diasporas as entities in IR theory and global politics is becoming less accurate and therefore less analytically useful in modern times. From a theoretical standpoint, the thesis has in its empirical (corpus/webCA) chapters, quite literally shown that it is indeed possible to trace and visualise the transnational dimensions⁸⁴⁷ that shape new online diasporic mobilisation processes. The domain name content analysis (the Venn diagrams in Chapter 7) presented in this thesis illustrates that online forms of diaspora politics do not always replicate the triadic relational model. The diagrams also make it clear that people involved in online diaspora identity politics do not conceptualise nationhood and statehood as one in the same thing. To oversimplify this relationship (or equate it to host-homeland relations) is to oversimplify the imaginative,

⁸⁴⁴ This thesis is consistent with Nazli Choucri’s (a noted pioneer of cyberpolitics) argument that more work needs to be done to capture the online dimensions of international politics. See: Choucri 2012, 23.

⁸⁴⁵ Castells 2009.

⁸⁴⁶ Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003; Agnew 1994, 2003; Adamson 2016.

⁸⁴⁷ Adamson and Demetriou 2007.

expressive and participatory aspects of online diasporic engagements.⁸⁴⁸ In this thesis, I pointed out that cyberspace is a site of power that affords non-state actors the ability to mobilise around key activities, themes and issues of interest. These active practices are unsettling the boundaries of previously politicised identities, and are creating intra-diasporic cleavages that require more systematically robust analytical lenses to examine in more detail. This is important because it tells us that far from a united and consistent entity, the very concept of diaspora identity is a contested one, and can instead be seen as something that is constantly in flux and can be constructed differently between dispersed peoples in various environments when negotiated against local surroundings. The user-centred nature of the online world implies a far more reflexive process of identity formation, whereby individual and collective identities interact and aggregate to form diaspora identity politics. Beyond academia, and speaking more broadly in terms of ‘real-world’ implications, there is a clear need to move past essentialist and primordial assumptions and disentangle notions of collective identity from loyalties to the homeland. To do this requires a significant reassessment in the way scholars view diasporas—moving beyond triadic relationships in favour of a more transnationally scaled network based on issues, identity and activities that consider how global diaspora politics actually take shape.

8.5 Reflections of Methodology and Research Limitations

As with any study, this thesis too has its limitations. From a research design perspective, I found that the interactive user-centred features of Web 2.0 online networks (a network of networks) pose methodological challenges in terms of depth and scope. In my discussion of the essentialist and primordial approaches to diaspora (Chapter 2), I pointed out that analysing global diaspora politics in an online context is far more complex compared to the nation-state container-based approaches that currently dominate IR theory and international affairs. I explained that without ‘Big Data’ research methods, studies of global diaspora politics often follow a deductive reasoning approach, implicitly reinforcing grounded triadic relational models through a capped or restricted sample size (specific locations, elite actors). This approach would have limited my ability to trace and visualise the growing

⁸⁴⁸ That ‘imagination’ in politics is lacking (see: Mandaville 2001, 2003 and Hine 2005). In chapter 2 I explained that Brinkerhoff (2009) looks at online participation, however in a more instrumental context.

disconnection between notions of territory-bound collective identity and the multidimensional⁸⁴⁹ communicative practices structuring identity-based diasporic political expressions.

By using the digital tools developed by the e-diaspora Atlas Project, I was able to sketch and map out the online presence of Sikh, Tamil and Palestinian diasporas. I used these Big Data research methods to contribute a transnationally scaled cartographic visualisation of the online network linkages that connected the diaspora identity politics of each case study. Having said that, I was aware from the onset of the project that these cartographic results (the corpus maps) represented a particular moment in time, based on a series of web-crawls that had a definitive start and end date (see Chapter 3). I did not trace ongoing web-based network changes in real-time. To minimise this static limitation, the data collected from the e-diaspora Atlas was analysed with caution and considered a point of inference that would require further unpacking through complementary methodologies (webCA, interviews). I was also aware that by building my sample off the e-diaspora Atlas I was choosing not to engage more closely with other 'Big Data' sets (Twitter, more in depth Hashtag tracing or smartphone app usage).

With greater technical resources, it would have been interesting to explore a sample set of website nodes against variables of time or conflict cycle periods to follow changes in network linkages or website content in depth and more precisely. To draw out any sort of causal inferences, the study would have had to use longitudinal data, which would have compromised the case study contribution of this present thesis. In addition to technical limitations, the study was also limited in terms of node sample sizes used to conduct web-based content analysis (n=120) and arrange key respondent interviews (n=24). A larger-scale web-based content analysis or more interviews (across different locales such as London) would have likely revealed interesting qualitative findings, but it would have only been possible with more time or fewer empirical cases. I regard these points as unavoidable criticisms of case study approaches and as points that merit further exploration, which should be undertaken in future as part of a larger project.

⁸⁴⁹ On the multi-dimensional nature of these media infused mobilisations, see Georgiou 2013.

8.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Moving on from the above limitations, I will now conclude this thesis with suggestions for future research in this timely and pressing area of study. In the simplest of terms, this thesis has shed light on the growing interconnectedness between online political expressions and offline political participation. It has shown that web-based (user-centred) transnational networks encourage new forms of diaspora identity politics which, while neglected in the current study of International Relations, increasingly matter in world affairs. In doing so, my thesis pushes for a fundamental intervention in the ways that we as scholars approach global politics in today's digital age. The online focus of my thesis has demonstrated that the theoretical and methodological assumptions guiding traditional nation-state 'container'-based approaches to international politics hamper our ability to escape triadic lenses and objectively analyse contemporary diasporic phenomenon.

At the same time, Internet web 2.0 technologies are changing the very conduct of everyday politics because ordinary people from multiple locales now have access to a plethora of resources (goods and capital, communicative data, information and knowledge) at their fingertips. This thesis has shown the usefulness of web 2.0 online platforms in publicising and organising around identity-infused grievance claims and political agendas that may otherwise remain underrepresented in world affairs. My recommendations stem from the empirical findings of this thesis and the shifting power dynamics being fostered through web 2.0 technologies (more aggregated, relational, informative and participative forms of influence) that stand to benefit resource-poor⁸⁵⁰ non-state actors involved in global diaspora politics.

As an immediate follow up to this online focused thesis, I recommend more in-depth consideration of the offline context, particularly in terms of key locations that came up during the empirical research findings. A comparative study focusing on global cities⁸⁵¹ (particularly London) would be a fruitful way to challenge state-centric 'methodological nationalism' and introduce new sites or arenas of power (such as cities) to diaspora politics. In this type of study, corpus statistical data could be used to tease out how non-state actors located in different cities relate or link in to the international arena. Another way to approach

⁸⁵⁰ Sassen 2004; Sassen 2008; Latham and Sassen 2005; Sassen 2012.

⁸⁵¹ Adamson and 2012; Adamson 2016.

this question would be to use corpus data as a point of inference to cross-compare different emerging global cities (such as Toronto and Paris), to consider whether the socio-political environment in countries of settlement shape or create different forms of diaspora politics. As mentioned in the limitations section of this chapter, corpus data could also be used to cross-compare key authority websites (across or within the cases) in a longitudinal shift. This would entail collecting homepage content over a longer period of time, which could then be used to evaluate through statistical correlation the ways in which diaspora discourse and points of emphasis change over time.

Future studies should tap into the user-centred features of digital networks with more technical precision and use interdisciplinary approaches that are better able to capture flexible identity formations. My thesis has shown that the transnational processes that shape diasporic identities are growing increasingly complex (and less essential) due to the unlimited opportunities for participation made available through web 2.0. Only with fresh theoretical approaches and innovative methodologies will we be able to understand the new power of online friending and following, website linking and content sharing. Indeed, more work needs to be done on the ways in which resource-poor non-state actors, including those involved in diaspora politics, can make their presence known through aggregates, tweets, hashtags and smartphone applications. This requires scholars to recognise that web 2.0 is more than just an instrument for on-the-ground politics, but functions instead as an informal infrastructure connecting and permeating state actions, politics and dispersed communities across the globe.

Finally, I conclude by discussing the most notable contribution this thesis makes to contemporary diaspora studies, the discipline of International Relations and global politics more broadly: its use of 'Big Data' research methods and its extensive online-led exploration of diaspora identity politics. Such an area of research has never before been attempted, and my thesis stands as an attempt to break new ground in cross-discipline research. My thesis stands as a recommendation in itself, an invitation for other scholars to (re)consider the online world as an independent and intervening variable in international politics. This thesis is an example of what mixed-methods looks like in the digital age, and urges IR scholars to recognise that Internet-based research does not deflate or overshadow the importance of the nation-state in world affairs. I would argue that methodologies from other disciplines such as

computer science and new media information technology only strengthen and resolve the 'low/high politics' dilemma that has shrouded progress in this fruitful area of research. If the discipline of IR wants to stay relevant and move forward, it must adopt methodologies that are able to capture and fully grasp the technological changes that have come to define contemporary society in cultural, political and social terms.

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Glossary

Blog (weblog) – A type of website with minimal external editing, usually updated and run by an individual or informal group. Blogs are often written conversationally, enabling people to reply or give feedback on content (Tumblr, WordPress, Blogspot).

Browser – software programs that are used to access and explore the World Wide Web. These (web) browsers navigate using hypertext links and can be viewed on various computer devices and include services like email, audio/video data (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari).

Cyberspace – electronic space in which communication occurs through connected computer networks. The transactions occur between different computers (also commonly referred to as ‘the virtual’, ‘the web’, or ‘online’).

Dead/Inactive Website – there are different situations that would render a website dead or inactive. For example, such websites may be censored by governing authorities. The URL address of the abandoned websites may still appear occupied, however the domain name may be on sale. The website may also redirect to a new address and function as a zombie site (living but dead).

Domain name – a unique part of a network address that identifies the Internet website.

Homepage – the introductory default page of a website, offering direct links to different contents of the site.

IP Address – an IP (Internet Protocol) address is a unique set of numbers that define each device (known as a host) communicating on the Internet. Every computer (desktop/laptop), scanner, printer, smartphone, tablet is assigned an IP address. This is considered an Internet fingerprint of a device’s geo-location. In this study, a website (or node as a connection point) is anything with an IP address.

Network – a system of two or more computer systems interconnected that are able to link and share information.

Proxy Server – a server (system software or application) that allows users to conceal or assume a different IP address, thereby hiding their geo-location. Proxies bypass restricted information, website blocks, government controls and can be used to anonymously surf the World Wide Web.

Search Engine – resides in a browser, and is a web based system for searching information available on the World Wide Web (Google, Bing, Ask, Yahoo).

URL address – or Uniform Resource Locator address is the formal address of a document on the Internet. An Internet address (example: <http://www.website.com/info>), consists of the access protocol (http), the domain name (www.website.com), and can include a path to a file or resource (info).

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Hub – a node with a large number of links leading from it (a site that cites a lot), also known as ‘outbound links’. These nodes characteristically maintain links with sites that engage in similar activities, coded as the same activity in the corpus.

Authority – a node with a large number of links leading towards it (a site often cited), also known as ‘inbound links’. These sites have a great deal of influence in the corpus. These nodes are the biggest on the graph, as determined by the number of links entering them.

Bridge site – a node that plays the role of a ‘station’ between two or more clusters or areas of the graph, the bridge can be 1) *representative* of the community, 2) the *mediator* cited by two clusters that belong to neither, 3) *translator* or *commentator*, which can act as a linguistic bridge between different sites.

Edges – the technical term for inbound or outbound connections that link two nodes, also known as hyperlinks between sites.

Inbound link – when a node that receives an edge (hyperlink) from another node, the site is being cited by another corpus site.

Outbound link – when a node cites another node externally, these edges (hyperlink) go outward from the site.

Density – the proportion of edges flowing (hyperlinking) into a cluster of node websites (categorised by type of website, actor, activity, language or country).

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Content Analysis—Sample Websites

Sikh

| SIKH | URL | In Degree | Activity |
|------|---|-----------|------------------------|
| 1 | http://sikhnet.com/ | 168 | community |
| 2 | http://sikhitothemax.com/ | 97 | culture |
| 3 | http://sikhiwiki.org/ | 89 | religion |
| 4 | http://allaboutsikhs.com/ | 71 | education |
| 5 | http://sikhs.org/ | 68 | culture |
| 6 | http://sgpc.net/ | 67 | religion |
| 7 | http://unitedsikhs.org/ | 57 | peace |
| 8 | http://panthic.org/ | 57 | news |
| 9 | http://sikhchic.com/ | 53 | community |
| 10 | http://sikhcoalition.org/ | 51 | political human rights |
| 11 | http://akj.org/ | 45 | religion |
| 12 | http://sikhsangat.com/ | 44 | news |
| 13 | http://sikhsangat.org/ | 43 | community |
| 14 | http://gurbani.org/ | 38 | religion |
| 15 | http://sikhtoons.com/ | 38 | media |
| 16 | http://thelangarhall.com/ | 35 | community |
| 17 | http://manvirsingh.blogspot.com/ | 32 | religion |
| 18 | http://sikhnn.com/ | 31 | news |
| 19 | http://sikhspectrum.com/ | 30 | community |
| 20 | http://ensaaf.org/ | 29 | community |

| SIKH | URL | Out Degree | Activity |
|-------------|---|-------------------|------------------|
| 1 | http://sikhiwiki.org/ | 131 | religion |
| 2 | http://thelangarhall.com/ | 44 | community |
| 3 | http://esikhs.com/ | 44 | religion |
| 4 | http://mistakesingh.blogspot.com/ | 41 | commemoration |
| 5 | http://mapleleafsikh.com/ | 40 | media |
| 6 | http://boss-uk.org/ | 39 | culture |
| 7 | http://lakhvir.wordpress.com/ | 39 | religion |
| 8 | http://sikhiwiki.com/ | 39 | religion |
| 9 | http://singhangad.wordpress.com/ | 33 | religion |
| 10 | http://gurbani.org/ | 32 | religion |
| 11 | http://nandeepsingh.blogspot.com/ | 32 | religion |
| 12 | http://worldsikhcouncil.org/ | 29 | community |
| 13 | http://thesikhdirectory.com/ | 28 | community |
| 14 | http://sikhsangat.com/ | 27 | news |
| 15 | http://tuhitu.blogspot.com/ | 27 | religion |
| 16 | http://restoringthepride.com/ | 27 | media |
| 17 | http://singhsrus.blogspot.com/ | 25 | news |
| 18 | http://sikhtimes.com/ | 24 | news |
| 19 | http://roadtokhalistan.blogspot.com/ | 24 | political rights |
| 20 | http://khalsa.com/ | 24 | community |

Tamil

| TAMIL | URL | In Degree | Activity |
|--------------|---|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | http://tamilnet.com/ | 105 | news |
| 2 | http://dailymirror.lk/ | 96 | news |
| 3 | http://srilankaguardian.org/ | 60 | news |
| 4 | http://hindustantimes.com/ | 50 | news |
| 5 | http://lankaweb.com/ | 49 | news |
| 6 | http://groundviews.org/ | 45 | news |
| 7 | http://thehindu.com/ | 44 | news |
| 8 | http://tamilcanadian.com/ | 43 | community |
| 9 | http://lankaenews.com/ | 42 | news |
| 10 | http://tamilguardian.com/ | 40 | news |
| 11 | http://news.lk/ | 40 | news |
| 12 | http://infolanka.com/ | 39 | community |
| 13 | http://transcurrents.com/ | 39 | news |
| 14 | http://colombopage.com/ | 39 | news |
| 15 | http://nation.lk/ | 39 | news |
| 16 | http://sangam.org/ | 38 | community |
| 17 | http://lankabusinessonline.com/ | 34 | news |
| 18 | http://lankanewsweb.com/ | 31 | news |
| 19 | http://lankanewspapers.com/ | 30 | news |
| 20 | http://dbsjeyaraj.com/ | 27 | community |

| TAMIL | URL | Out Degree | Activity |
|--------------|---|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | http://uktamilnews.com/ | 64 | news |
| 2 | http://srilankastateterrorism.blogspot.com/ | 50 | human rights |
| 3 | http://globalpeacesupport.com/ | 49 | political human rights |
| 4 | http://slnewsonline.net/ | 42 | human rights |
| 5 | http://srilanka-warcrimes.blogspot.com/ | 41 | human rights |
| 6 | http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.com/ | 40 | political human rights |
| 7 | http://tamilnation.co/ | 39 | community |
| 8 | http://www.spur.asn.au/ | 36 | peace |
| 9 | http://defencenet.blogspot.com/ | 33 | news |
| 10 | http://mawbimasrilanka.com/ | 32 | news |
| 11 | http://tamilwritersguild.com/ | 32 | culture |
| 12 | http://infolanka.com/ | 31 | community |
| 13 | http://lankaweb.com/ | 29 | news |
| 14 | http://sangam.org/ | 29 | community |
| 15 | http://defenceanalytics.blogspot.com/ | 28 | human rights |
| 16 | http://defencewire.blogspot.com/ | 27 | news |
| 17 | http://groundviews.org/ | 26 | news |
| 18 | http://lakbima.com/ | 25 | news |
| 19 | http://thefuturematara.blogspot.com/ | 25 | media |
| 20 | http://lankanewsweb.com/ | 22 | news |

Palestinian

| PALESTINIAN | URL | In Degree | Activity |
|-------------|---|-----------|------------------|
| 1 | http://electronicintifada.net/ | 415 | news |
| 2 | http://bdsmovement.net/ | 262 | boycott |
| 3 | http://palsolidarity.org/ | 255 | protest |
| 4 | http://mondoweiss.net/ | 245 | policy |
| 5 | http://palestinechronicle.com/ | 223 | news |
| 6 | http://amnesty.org/ | 223 | human rights |
| 7 | http://stopthewall.org/ | 218 | protest |
| 8 | http://freegaza.org/ | 217 | protest |
| 9 | http://pchrgaza.org/ | 211 | human rights |
| 10 | http://palestinemonitor.org/ | 196 | news |
| 11 | http://badil.org/ | 195 | community |
| 12 | http://endtheoccupation.org/ | 177 | lobby |
| 13 | http://palestinecampaign.org/ | 174 | solidarity |
| 14 | http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/ | 172 | policy |
| 15 | http://ifamericansknew.org/ | 166 | news |
| 16 | http://miftah.org/ | 152 | political rights |
| 17 | http://richardsilverstein.com/ | 139 | news |
| 18 | http://972mag.com/ | 132 | news |
| 19 | http://imeu.net/ | 129 | news |
| 20 | http://al-awda.org/ | 125 | news |

| PALESTINIAN | URL | Out Degree | Activity |
|--------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | http://desertpeace.wordpress.com/ | 163 | news |
| 2 | http://palestinepost.org/ | 127 | news |
| 3 | http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/ | 109 | human rights |
| 4 | http://wideasleepinamerica.com/ | 107 | news |
| 5 | http://usacbi.org/ | 89 | boycott |
| 6 | http://cifwatch.com/ | 87 | multicultural minority rights |
| 7 | http://mondoweiss.net/ | 85 | policy |
| 8 | http://filasteen.wordpress.com/ | 85 | media |
| 9 | http://kadaitcha.com/ | 84 | media |
| 10 | http://bodyontheline.wordpress.com/ | 81 | human rights |
| 11 | http://richardsilverstein.com/ | 80 | news |
| 12 | http://jffjp.com/ | 80 | peace |
| 13 | http://leedspsc.org.uk/ | 79 | solidarity |
| 14 | http://vtjp.org/ | 78 | peace |
| 15 | http://sadaka.ie/ | 77 | political rights |
| 16 | http://twinningwithpalestine.net/ | 76 | community |
| 17 | http://endisraeliapartheid.blogspot.com/ | 74 | news |
| 18 | http://karmalised.com/ | 72 | media |
| 19 | http://ngo-monitor.org/ | 71 | community |
| 20 | http://boycottzionism.wordpress.com/ | 71 | boycott |

APPENDIX B - CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

| Sikh | frequency | Palestinian | frequency | Tamil | frequency |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1984 | 69 | activism | 49 | accountable | 18 |
| accountable | 1 | apartheid | 238 | activism | 9 |
| bravery | 22 | attack | 117 | activists | 67 |
| civil rights | 6 | boycott | 236 | amnesty | 71 |
| defend(er) | 9 | campaign | 313 | asylum | 60 |
| donor | 3 | commemorate | 8 | attack | 228 |
| donate | 35 | condemn | 18 | boycott | 34 |
| empower(ment) | 10 | democracy | 87 | citizens | 153 |
| equal(ity) | 49 | detention | 51 | conspiracy | 34 |
| faith | 75 | equality | 24 | corruption | 41 |
| fund | 0 | fear | 28 | crimes | 510 |
| Golden Temple | 29 | freedom | 171 | democracy | 107 |
| generation | 9 | government | 152 | deportation/ed | 37 |
| God | 317 | grassroots | 23 | diaspora | 231 |
| Guru | 928 | honor | 17 | entertainment | 26 |
| human(ity) | 64 | human rights | 289 | freedom | 126 |
| human rights | 72 | identity | 31 | genocide | 104 |
| identity | 21 | illegal | 77 | grassroots | 4 |
| inequality | 0 | independence | 0 | human rights | 621 |
| legal | 17 | inequality | 0 | identity | 34 |
| massacre | 9 | Islam | 136 | inequality | 2 |
| memory | 4 | justice | 215 | justice | 164 |
| military | 22 | lobby | 51 | killings | 322 |
| mission | 30 | memory | 13 | memory | 27 |
| nation | 29 | military | 162 | military | 389 |
| nationalism | 1 | Muslim | 85 | minority | 26 |
| Operation Blue Star | 1 | nation | 88 | nation | 371 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|------|------------|-----|--------------------|------|
| philosophy/er | 23 | occupation | 342 | policy | 180 |
| protest | 12 | post war | 0 | post war | 49 |
| protester | 0 | prison | 45 | protest | 159 |
| purify | 2 | prisoner | 68 | rebel | 86 |
| race | 16 | protest | 76 | rebellion | 2 |
| reconciliation | 0 | refugee | 105 | reconciliation | 401 |
| religion/ous | 159 | resistance | 156 | refugee | 129 |
| sacred | 22 | rights | 679 | right | 326 |
| sacrifice | 16 | sanctions | 77 | security | 314 |
| Sikh | 1834 | solidarity | 222 | self determination | 14 |
| spirit(ual) | 144 | statehood | 11 | stories | 45 |
| suffer | 23 | suffer | 6 | suffer | 119 |
| turban | 78 | suffering | 16 | torture | 71 |
| violence | 15 | support | 284 | victim | 116 |
| warrior | 11 | union | 72 | war | 1263 |
| youth | 55 | violence | 68 | youth | 58 |

APPENDIX C - INTERVIEWEES

Interview Outreach (Letter Sample)

Hello name of actor,

My name is Priya Kumar, and I am a doctoral student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS London). My research focuses on diaspora communities and the World Wide Web, namely how the online is being used and for what kinds of activities. I have been doing digital mapping (through the e-Diasporas Atlas project) and would like to complement the online parts of my study with reflections from the 'real-world'.

I was hoping to set up a time to discuss your first hand experiences and community engagements in greater detail. Any questions, comments or reflections are most welcome, and I am more than happy to share my mapping results at a later date.

Sample Interview Questions (Loose Guidelines for Semi-Structure Interviews)

Settings: Make note of the surroundings (local coffee shops, offices, universities, telephone, voice-over, Internet Protocol services such as Skype, email)

Demographic Realities & Considerations:

(Name, age bracket, sex, type of actor, role within the organisation.)

Tell me about yourself?

How did you get involved in the organisation?

(Anything specific)

* ease into online, ask if it is a key strategy or aid in daily organisation

The Actors, Mandates & Goals:

Generally, what does the actor or organisation seek to achieve?

Are you content with current progress? (yes/no....why)

In terms of audience demographics, any particular focus? Target Audiences?

(who do you hope to engage more than others?)

Generally, which audiences do you normally attract (age, location)?

Do you ever have to deal with generational differences?

(potential relevancy of language, shared memories, grievances, migration patterns)

Notable engagement trends: can you separate online activity support from ground activity?

(If yes) any differences in the goals or strategies employed online?

Hurdles:

Any challenges or hurdles?

(admin issues, or with other actors, competing narratives)

Do you ever feel you compete with other organisations?

Do past memories or grievance narratives matter to today's populations?

(uphill battles? Defensive, how is host country discussed)

With reference to technological innovations like the web:

Misrepresentations/being misunderstood online?

(For example: narratives and objectives being lost in translation, how audiences receive or engage back)

On the ground: how do you deal with different sentiments of attachment or personal experiences from community members?

Where does the web fit in with the greater _____ community?

(increased/decreased interaction/discussion between people, event planning, re-routing of commemorative)

Future Prospects & Loose Ends

Do you consider yourself a social/political entrepreneur of sorts?

(yes or no why)

Do you consider yourself a community representative/advocate?

How do you see the web...the World Wide Web:

(utility, platform of engagement, diffuse and communicate messages)

Is it helping/ hindering:

- diaspora links (transnational networks/greater community?)
- the actor/organisation
- political mobilisation activities/identity representation expression

Current advocacy or intra-community affairs?

Are you hopeful for the future considering current trends?

(How is the web changing migrant issues or diaspora politics compared to past)

| | ACTOR | CONTACT NAME | CLASSIFIED | LOCATION | CONDUCTED VIA |
|---|--|---------------------|--------------------|--|----------------------|
| 1 | Groundviews (19-03-12) | Sanjana Hattotuwa | group | Sri Lanka | e-mail |
| 2 | Global Peace Support (16-04-12) | K.Kunabalasingam | group | London | e-mail |
| 3 | Canadian Tamil Congress (21-06-12) | David Poopalapillai | organisation | GTA - Scarborough | meeting |
| 4 | TESOC Multicultural Settlement Services (06-07-12) | Govin | organisation | GTA - Scarborough | meeting |
| 5 | Tamil Canadian (22-07-12) | Sutha | group | GTA - Scarborough | telephone |
| 6 | Black July 83 (19-07-12) | Annete S | organisation | GTA - Scarborough | telephone |
| 7 | Tamil Guardian (23-08-12) | Sivakami | media organisation | London | meeting |
| 8 | TYOUK (20-09-12) | Mario | organisation | London | meeting |
| | ACTOR | CONTACT NAME | CLASSIFIED | LOCATION | CONDUCTED VIA |
| 1 | 972 (29-03-12) | Dimi Reider | media organisation | Israel/Pal, Interview in London | meeting |
| 2 | CiF Watch (04-04-12) | Adam Levick | group | Focus on London Interview in Israel | skype |
| 3 | Not in Our Name (NION) (20-06-12) | Charnie | group | GTA - Toronto Downtown | meeting |
| 4 | Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)(15-05-12) | Jesse | organisation | New York Chapter with office in California | meeting |
| 5 | Badil (15-06-12) | Nidal al-Azza | organisation | Palestine | skype |
| 6 | Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP) (11-05-12) | Sarah Benton | organisation | London | skype |
| 7 | Palestine House (21-06-12) | Issam Al yamani | group | GTA - Mississauga | meeting |
| 8 | Toronto Palestinian Film Festival (13-07-12) | Nausheen | organisation | GTA -Toronto Downtown | meeting |
| | ACTOR | CONTACT NAME | CLASSIFIED | LOCATION | CONDUCTED VIA |
| 1 | The Langar Hall (11-04-12) | Jodha Singh | group | California/Global Blog | skype |
| 2 | Sikh Directory (15-03-12) | Navdeep Singh | organisation | London | meeting |
| 3 | United Sikhs - London Chapter (26-03-12) | Mejinderpaul Kaur | organisation | London | meeting |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| 4 | United Sikhs - Toronto Chapter (23-07-12) | Ranbir Singh, Sukhwinder Singh | organisation | GTA - Mississauga | meeting |
| 5 | Maple Leaf Sikh (22-06-12) | Kulvir Singh | individual blogger | GTA - Brampton | telephone |
| 6 | Sikh Activist Network (13-07-12) | Loveleen Kaur | organisation | GTA - North Yorth/Toronto | meeting |
| 7 | American Turban (07-12-12) | Rupinder Mohan Singh | group | California/Global Blog | e-mail |
| 8 | iiSuperwomani (17-07-12) | Lilly Singh | blogger/vlogger | GTA - Brampton | meeting |